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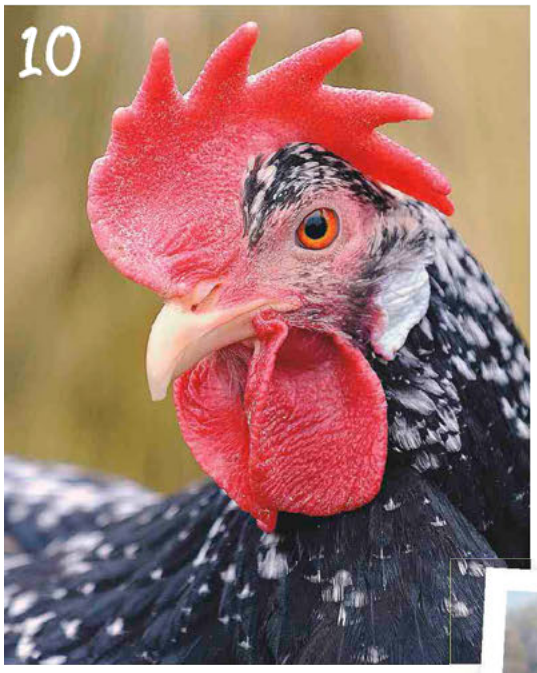

Contents

December 2014

6. **Poultry news**

10. **Buying guide: Ancona**
COVER STORY This is a breed that has plenty to offer the back-garden keeper

16. **Andy's diary**
The boundary fencing's in place at last as Andy prepares for winter

18. **The Gallery**
Another clutch of your poultry favourites caught on camera

20. **Talking point: Waterfowl**
A reader's thoughts on the treatment of geese in her local park

22. **A cracking idea**
COVER STORY The Woodland Trust is asking us all to plant trees for our chickens

26. **Gift aid!**
COVER STORY With Christmas just around the corner, we sample some present ideas for hen fanciers

30. **Top choice**
COVER STORY Brilliant broodies: a tempting group of natural mothers in the spotlight

35. **Lighting the way**
COVER STORY Learn how hen house lights can boost the egg production from your hens

40. **Moult in summary**
Don't be shocked by startling feather loss; it's totally natural!

44. **Your letters**
More of your views on chickens and the people who keep them!

46. **Chirpy behaviour**
COVER STORY Paul Donovan explains that hens have more to say than you might imagine

50. **Blog spot**
Trish Colton with more homely tales about her back-garden hens

52. **Crossing the line**
Fred Hams investigates the prospects for producing good, home-grown utility fowl

56. ***PP* back issues**
Missed an edition? Lost that favourite copy?Order a replacement today!

58. **Healthy options**
Ectoparasites: the practical low-down on lice, mites and fleas

62. **Poultry-friendly vets listing**

63. **Next month**

64. **Poultry Q&As**
More of your chicken-related problems solved

68. **Breed club directory**

70. ***PP* classified ads**

72. **Cockerel conundrum**
How to cope with the taxing problem of surplus males

76. ***PP* Subscriptions offer**

78. **Breeders directory**
It's still the UK's biggest and best!

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Planting the future

Meet this month's team...

Andy Marshall
Andy's diary **p16**

Trish Colton
Blog spot **p50**

Terry Beebe
Q&As **p64**

David Parsons
Healthy options **p58**

Fred Hams
Utility matters **p52**

Alan Holtham
Surplus cockerels **p72**

I'm delighted to be able to promote the latest campaign being organised by The Woodland Trust in this issue (see page 22). Planting trees is a fundamentally good thing to do, regardless of the scale on which you're able to do it.

Whether you're establishing a natural woodland on a three-acre site in Devon, or planting a couple of trees in a Deptford back garden, you're making a positive difference. As the Trust points out, the UK is now one of the least wooded countries in Europe, and both trees and woodlands are continuing to disappear from our landscape.

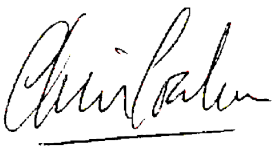
The article this month emphasises the importance and benefits of providing overhead cover for your chickens. The fact that all our breeds descend from jungle-dwelling fowl, means that chickens retain an innate desire to be sheltered from above. They are happiest and most relaxed when able to scratch around under a protective, vegetative canopy.

As chicken keepers and enthusiasts, our number one aim should always be to ensure that our birds are as comfortable as they possibly can be, and their immediate environment plays a crucial role in this objective.

By and large, happy hens will be healthy hens, and those which are able to enjoy the natural security of shrubs, hedges and, best of all, a few trees, will be the most contented and productive of the lot.

Of course, planting trees is never a quick-fix type of activity; it requires thought, planning and time. Tree-planters need to take a step back and look at the long game. Being careful about the species being planted – native is always best for wildlife – makes a big difference, too.

So, come on, grab your spade, pull on your boots and start doing yourself, your hens and the environment a favour by planting a tree or two!



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Subscriptions
(Annual 13 issue rates)
UK - £48.10
Europe/USA/Canada - £66.95
RoW - £72.15

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Email address: PP@ccmediagroup.co.uk
Kelsey Classifieds
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DISTRIBUTION
Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
www.seymour.co.uk

PRINTING
William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, Willenhall, West Midlands

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ISSN 1743-0712

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POULTRY NEWS

December Your monthly guide to what's new in the world of poultry keeping

If you have a news story, product launch details or some other topical item, email **pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk**

Calling all keepers!

Interesting period photographs like this one, and chicken-related stories more generally, are what this research project is all about. So come on, get involved!

After a flying start and cracking success around the north-east, HenPower is spreading its wings to reach hen keepers across the globe in a research initiative aiming to unearth and share hen tales and chicken stories with 'henthusiasts' near and far.

The project – part-funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and led by older people's charity Equal Arts – hopes to see the stories of more than 1,000 people captured through film, literature, photography and audio recordings.

The overall purpose is to explore the cultural and social changes in hen keeping, taking it from necessity during times of war, to a family-friendly hobby with hens being kept as pets.

Dr Naomi Sykes, senior lecturer in archeology at the University of Nottingham which is taking part in the project, said: "Running until 2017, this research will look at human and chicken interactions through time, when they became domesticated and why and how these changes explain our attitudes towards each other."

Filmmaker Dannielle Giddins, who is working with Equal Arts, added: "We've found chickens have sparked a real interest, with people of all ages and from different countries getting in touch to share their stories. We're looking for people in the UK – and further afield – to get involved and tell us their hen tale."

If you'd like to get involved and contribute stories or photographs, contact Danielle via email to: danielle@equalarts.org.uk, or visit the HenPower Facebook page.

Welsh wonder

Visitors to this year's 25th Royal Welsh Winter Fair will be treated to a spectacular display of some of the finest specimens of poultry from across the UK in the Winter Fair Poultry Show.

First established in 1992, the championship status show held under the rules of the Poultry Club of Great Britain, has long been a main attraction on the second day of this popular, annual event, which takes place this year on December 1st-2nd, in Llanelwedd.

With over 260 classes, special prizes and awards last year's show attracted 1,050 entries from across the UK, all hoping to get their hands on the Royal Welsh Champion Shield and the Poultry Club's Gold Award.

Breeding poultry for showing is a responsible, yet fun activity and is often a favourite with younger competitors. Within the schedule there are eight classes specifically for 12-16-year-olds, plus another seven classes for five-11-year-olds.

Last year 1,050 entries took part in the Royal Welsh Winter Fair Poultry Show and this year is hoped to be just as popular.

Show tickets offer

Readers interested in visiting next year's Edible Garden Show at London's Alexandra Palace, can take advantage of a fantastic 2 for £20 ticket offer available through the magazine.

The Edible Garden Show bursts into bloom on March 20th-22nd alongside the new lifestyle event, Good Life Live. Perfectly timed for the beginning of the growing season, The Edible Garden Show offers a fertile mix of celebrity speakers, interactive advice sessions and hands-on demonstrations.

New for 2015 is a dedicated 'Chicken Coop', where visitors can find out all there is to know about keeping chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys. Poultry Talk and The British Hen Welfare Trust will be on hand offering practical advice, plus hands-on demonstrations on topics such as caring for city hens, nutrition, common ailments and hens in the garden.

To take advantage of this great offer (normal ticket price is £20 each on the door), simply quote PP15 when purchasing two tickets at **www.theediblegardenshow.co.uk.** Don't delay as availability is limited!

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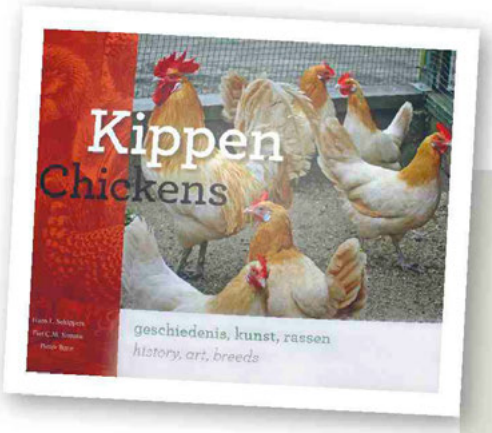

Chickens: history, art, breeds (Roodbont Publishers B.V., ISBN-13: 978-9087401627) is the latest book by well-known, Dutch poultry fancier Sir Hans Schippers, with help from Piet Simons and Peter Borst. Most importantly for UK readers, the book has been translated into English by David Bland.

It represents is a wonderful work and was launched successfully in Holland last May. The book not only deals with breeds of poultry but has superb chapters on the history and art of poultry, outlining just how breeds have developed through history, becoming the most important and widespread birds in the world today.

Some of the unique images date back 4,000 years, and the reader is able to trace how our birds have become so successful having being kept as useful, domestic animals for centuries.

Prospective readers should not be misled by the title of *Chickens* which, in this case, is the translation of the Dutch word 'Kippen'. The book covers the whole subject of poultry in a way that'll appeal to fanciers as well as anyone with an interest in birds.

Not surprisingly, this book gives a Dutch viewpoint on the hobby which, in my view, provides a refreshing, international flavour and should encourage even more British fanciers across the Channel to the Continent.

I was particularly interested to read about the Dutch Poultry Museum at Barneveld which, as well as being a museum, holds examples of all 20 of the Dutch, national breeds for the public to admire.

This book is a classic piece of work that's beautifully presented and packed full of interesting facts; a real page-turner that's guaranteed to fascinate poultry enthusiasts everywhere.

Chris Parker

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If you're in the market for some new fence posts for a chicken enclosure, then you should consider the range available from Kidderminster-based M&M Timber.

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Poultry Club news

The chairman and vice-chairman of the Poultry Club of Great Britain regret to announce that the general secretary of the Poultry Club, Mrs Ann Bachmet, has resigned.

Ann has given loyal service to the club for over nine years, and is highly respected among the members of the club. During her term of office, her workload has increased enormously as the club has grown, and she has worked tirelessly to incorporate new systems to cope with the increase in membership.

Ann has agreed to stay on until the end of March, 2015, which is the club's financial year end. This will also give time for the officials to appoint her successor and a job description will be issued later.

We wish Ann well for the future and would like to say what a great pleasure it has been to work with her during her successful tenure in office.

Edward Boothman & Chris Parker, PCGB

Temperature check

Take the guesswork out of turkey temperature testing with the SuperFast Thermapen® digital food thermometer.

This Christmas your turkey can finally reach the table perfectly cooked and succulent, thanks to the SuperFast Thermapen® digital food thermometer.

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However, use of the new Thermapen thermometer should remove all the uncertainty. Best practice is to insert the fine probe into the thickest parts of the turkey's breast and thigh. Both should give a reading of 75˚C or above. The skill is finding the lowest temperature, so it is advisable to move the probe up and down.

Once this minimum temperature is confirmed, the bird needs to be rested – loosely covered with foil – for 30-40 minutes to let the juices redistribute.

The SuperFast Thermapen is available in a number of colours, costs £57.60 and can be ordered online from **www.thermapen.co.uk.**

And briefly...

ON THE COVER

This month's cover features a stunning detail of a Rhode Island Red male; one of the five breeds featured in this months *Top choice* article, which starts on page 30.

SURREY SHOWS

The Surrey Poultry Society Autumn Show will be taking place on November 30th November, at the Worplesdon Village Hall, near Guildford. Moving into next year, the Society's Spring Show is to be held on February 1st, at the same venue. More details about both events are available from Terri Gregory on 07736 718430, or via email to: **surreypoultryshowsec@msn.com.**

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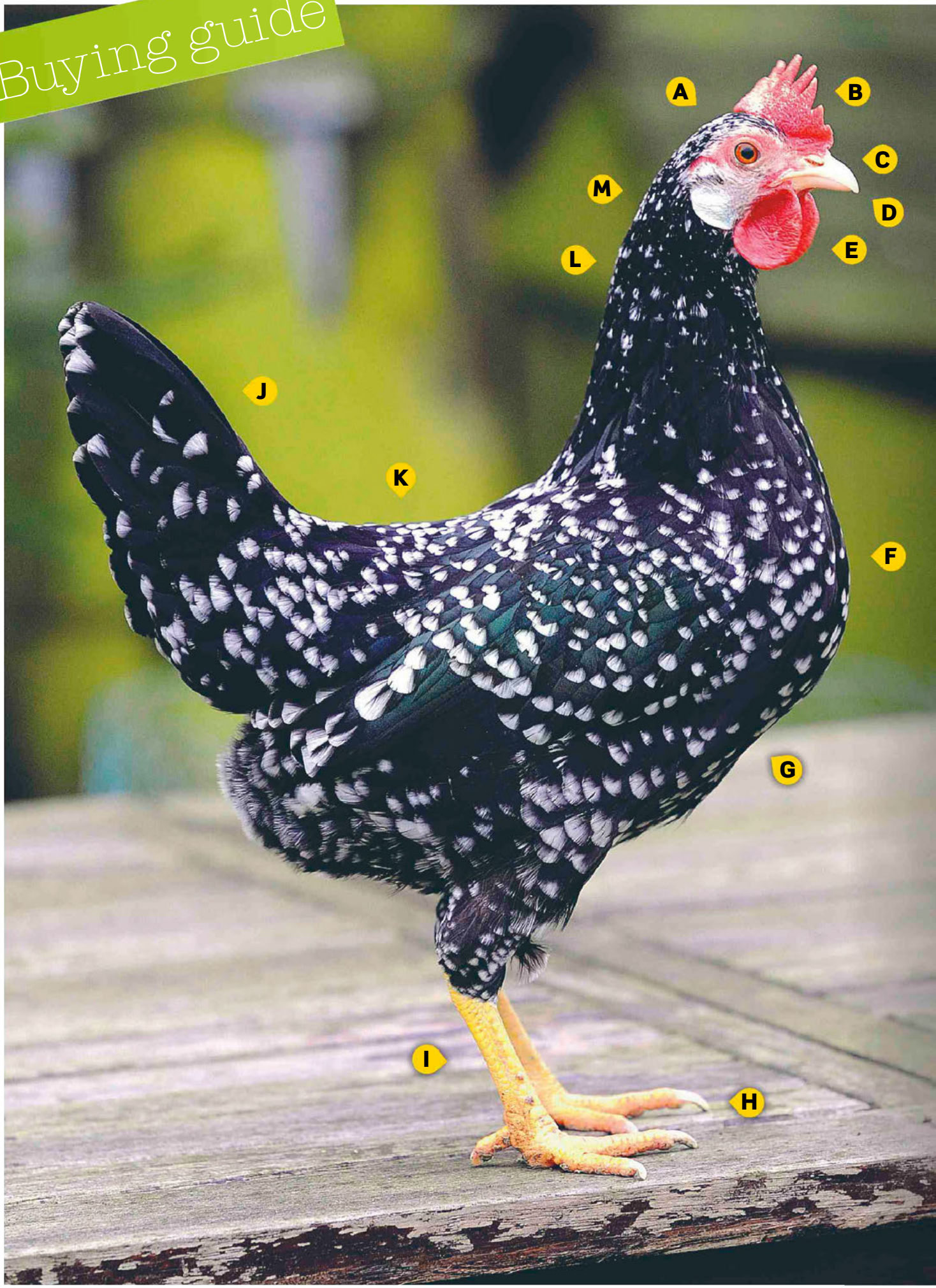


Ancona

Chris Graham reflects on the breed's past glories, but also discovers a bird that retains many plus points for today's back-garden hen keeper.

This Mediterranean light breed, named after the central Italian, Asiatic coastal region where it was discovered, first arrived in the UK during the early 1850s.

Developed in the Italian countryside as a useful farmyard fowl, the Ancona soon found many friends in England. A breed club was established in 1899 and still exists today, offering essential help and support to today's keepers.

Farmyard roots

The 'farmyard' nature of the Ancona's background makes it impossible to be completely sure about the breed's specific ancestry. But one popular suggestion is that it was developed as a derivative of that other famous Italian light breed, the Leghorn.

In fact, according to the breed club, there's very little hard evidence to support this theory, and it seems most likely that the breed simply resulted from a gradual process of inter-breeding among local fowl over generations, enhancing utility performance at every stage.

But the bird that arrived in the UK during the 1850s was quite different from the examples we have today. The white feather-tipping wasn't nearly as prominent, and general appearance was a good deal more plain.

Of course, in those early days, the main interest lay in what the bird could do. While some fanciers started to become interested in the Ancona's exhibition potential, most keepers took the view that this was a working bird. So development ran down two lines, and the utility strains produced turned into a major success.

Anconas regularly topped the charts in national laying trials during the 1930s and '40s, but the breed's position as a premier performer wasn't to last. It was the arrival of the newly-developed hybrid birds from America, in the years following the Second World War, that really put an end to its time as a viable, commercial stock bird.

Along with the majority of other pure breed layers, the Ancona simply couldn't compete with the prolific output of the carefully-bred laying machines from across the Atlantic.

Fall from fashion

As a consequence, the breed rapidly fell out of fashion as a commercial prospect. Sadly, the laying strains were allowed to fall away, and it was left to enthusiast keepers to maintain and develop the breed from then on. Fanciers had always recognised the Ancona's potential as a show bird, and had spent time establishing breeding programs aimed at improving feathering.

The basic objectives were to ensure a white tip on every feather, to deepen the black ground colour and, at the same time, enhance its beetle-green sheen. A further

> Anconas regularly topped the charts in national laying trials during the 1930s and '40s...

IMPORTANT BUYING TIPS

A A bright, prominent eye is an important feature on a good Ancona. The iris should be orange/red with a hazel pupil. Avoid birds displaying pale eyes.

B The single comb needs to be upright on the male and gracefully folded to one side on the female (as here). The up-to-seven serrations should be as deep, broad and even as possible. Overall the comb shouldn't be as well developed as on the Leghorn. The back of the comb should follow the line of the head; those that 'fly away' represent a serious fault. A rose combed-version also exists, but is very rare now.

C Face and wattles should be bright red. Be aware that white from the lobes can bleed on to the face on older males. This is a bad point among exhibition birds.

D Beak colour should ideally be yellow, shaded with black or horn. A completely yellow beak isn't desirable.

E Wattles need to be bright red, long, finely textured and sized in proportion with the comb.

F The large fowl Ancona body must be a good size, with strength, depth and length. There is a bit of a tendency these days for them to lack overall size. The breast should be prominent and carried forwards and upwards.

G Check wings for white feathers. Older birds will have more white, but you can be more tolerant of this. Young birds showing whole or half-white wing feathers should be avoided. Blotchy white tipping to the feathers, instead of the desired V-shaped marking, is a common problem. Clarity and evenness in these white markings are very important exhibition factors.

H The four toes on each foot should be long, thin and well spread. Steer clear of birds with twisted toes.

I Legs need to be of medium length, strong and set well apart. Colour should be yellow, with an even, black mottling. The degree of mottling can vary, sometimes from year to year on successive generations. Steer clear of birds with white/grey legs.

J The tail needs to be full and carried well. White tipping should continue on the tail feathers, even the sickles on male birds. Absence of this is a fault. Avoid birds showing a 'squirrel' tail.

K Check plumage undercolour on the back. It's important that it is black all the way down to the skin. On lesser examples you may well find undesirable grey or white undercolour. Avoid buying birds showing this defect.

L The neck of a good Ancona will be long, gracefully arched and well covered with hackle feathers.

M Ear lobes should be pure white, as with other Mediterranean breeds. Watch for a creamy-yellow colour here (feeding maize can promote this) and, more seriously, red in the lobe. The latter is a recognised exhibition defect.

> ... there have been enquiries from Italian enthusiasts to the UK club...

refinement concerned the form of the white feather tipping; breeders set themselves the difficult task of establishing this as V-shaped, rather than a simple, white blob.

From a practical point of view, however, the cost of this exhibition-led development was that laying performance was hit hard. While this isn't something that's by any means unique to the Ancona, it's a shame because this breed had been such a prolific performer in the first place.

Interestingly, the Ancona's demise wasn't a uniquely British phenomenon either; it's almost entirely fizzled-out in its homeland too. In fact, the situation has got so bad that there have been enquiries from Italian enthusiasts to the UK club, with a view to sourcing stock to bolster numbers in Italy.

Right: A double-folded comb like this one is something to be avoided; the comb is too big in the first place.

Below: The apparent 'lightness' of Anconas can vary, depending on the size and shape of the white feather tipping. You can clearly see here that the hen at the front appears much darker than the other two.

Simplicity

Nowadays, one of the attractions of the Ancona for the domestic enthusiast must surely be its simplicity, both in terms of its appearance and the ease of ownership. These birds are characterised by an alert, bold manner and a neat body that's both broad and compact. Males and females have a tidy, smart general appearance, featuring a prominent and full breast, large wings that are held tight and high and a full tail.

The head can feature either a single or rose comb; the former being upright and evenly serrated on male birds, but gracefully folded to one side on females. On rose-combed versions, this should resemble that found on a Wyandotte, and both comb types need to follow the line of the back of the head. Eyes should be prominent and bright, with an orange-red iris and a hazel pupil.

The beak needs to be yellow with black or horn-coloured shading, while the legs must be a similar yellow, but with black mottling (the more even, the better). The head sits on a pleasingly arched and well-hackled neck

Black is the only colour available here in the UK. A 'golden' has been created in Australia and, in Holland, they've developed a 'blue' version. Neither, though, is likely to be officially recognised by the club here. Generally, there seems little demand for additional colour variants.

Large fowl and bantam versions are available, with the latter – created in the late 1940s – being most popular for both exhibition and back garden enthusiasts these days. Bantams, as well as the convenience that their size brings, offer the added advantage of laying a decent-sized egg in numbers that can eclipse the large fowl.

Unfortunately, though, whichever size you fancy, getting

Ancona *at a glance...*

Plus points
- ✓ Rugged
- ✓ Disease- and parasite-resistant
- ✓ Attractive looks
- ✓ Decent layer
- ✓ Worthy of support

Minus points
- ✘ Males can be feisty
- ✘ Eggs can be small
- ✘ Birds difficult to source

Classification
Light, soft feather

Origin
Italy

Weights:
- **Large male,** 2.70-2.95kg (6-6.5lb)
- **Large female,** 2.25-2.50kg (5-5.5lb)
- **Bantam male,** 570-680g (20-24oz)
- **Bantam female,** 510-620g (18-22oz)

Egg laying
Approx. 160pa

Colours
Black and white

Above: Good female single comb complete with graceful fold. Eye colour good too.

Left: Achieving sharp-edged, V-shaped white tipping on Ancona feathers is no mean feat. There's a fine balance between too little and too much, and clearly defined markings or diffuse blotches.

hold of stock is likely to be a bit of a struggle. Although the breed club boasts 70+ members, only a handful of those are breeding large fowl stock in sufficient numbers to have a worthwhile surplus to sell. There's more scope with the bantam, as these are kept by the majority of members.

Good character
The Ancona is a light breed, and so tends to get tarred with the 'flighty and hard to handle' brush. But, according to the club, this is largely unjustified. They are certainly active but, if kept in the right way and handled carefully on a regular basis from a young age, there's no reason why they shouldn't grow into perfectly well-behaved and manageable birds. They love to forage if run on free range – a characteristic

that presumably harks back to the breed's Italian farmyard roots.

Also encouraging is the fact that the Ancona is very easy and undemanding to breed, keep and look after. They have no special requirements, and are generally very adaptable in a domestic environment. They will stand confinement well if needs be but, be warned, they can be wilful.

Single-combed Ancona bantams; more popular than the large fowl these days and layers of a good-sized, white-shelled egg too.

Odd colours

When the chicks first hatch, both the males and females are a combination of yellow and blackish-brown (bantam chicks have no black). Then, once the fluff is replaced by the first feathers, the colour scheme switches to a magpie-like black and white which, once again, isn't what most new keepers are expecting.

It's only once the final, adult feathers are produced (at about the six month mark), that keepers can get any idea about the quality of a bird's plumage colour and overall marking.

Anconas are always darkest in their first year. They become lighter (the amount of white on the feathers increases, giving a lighter overall impression), after the first adult moult. The rate of this lightening does vary a little, but seems to affect the females more noticeably than the males. So, from an exhibition point of view, the Ancona really is a first-year show bird.

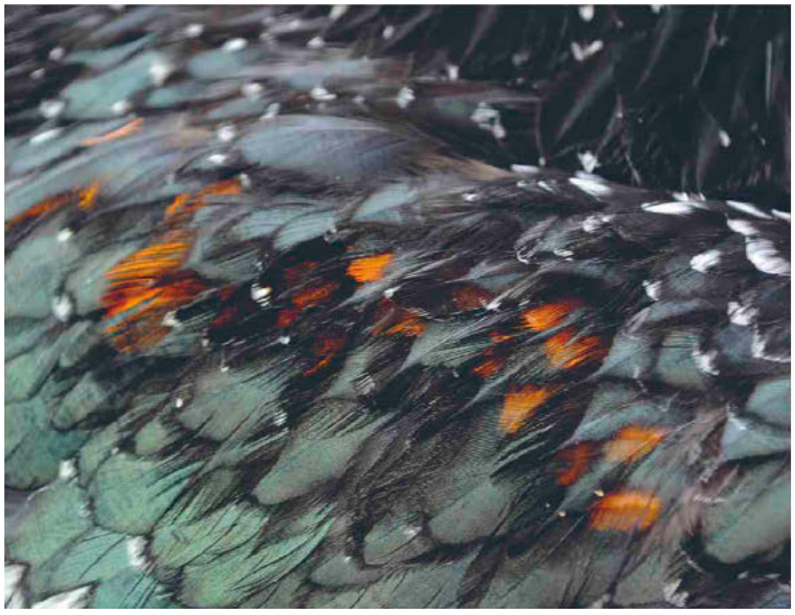
Above: This is the sort of black mottling that's required on an Ancona's legs. Achieving correct leg and beak colour, good white feather tipping and a beetle-green sheen all on the same bird is difficult to achieve.

Unlike many of the heavy breeds, such as the Orpington which tend to be easy to pick up and shut in at night, Anconas are usually rather more independently-minded.

Generally they will retire for the night when they're good and ready, and not before! Catching birds that don't want to be caught can be difficult; they are both fast and agile. They can fly too, if needs be.

From a breeding point of view, fertility levels are reasonably good (despite the relatively low numbers of birds overall), especially with the bantams. Chicks tend to hatch strongly and grow-on well. However, one important thing to note is that plumage colour among very young Anconas can be a little confusing. The youngsters bear no resemblance to the way they'll look finally, and this does tend to worry a lot of first-time keepers who aren't expecting this variance.

> From a breeding point of view, fertility levels are reasonably good...



Right: Red/brown like this in the wing feathers of females, or on the male shoulder, is undesirable from a showing point of view, but can be useful in the breeding pen. There appears to be a genetic link between it and the presence of beetle-green sheen. So careful use of it can improve this aspect.

Aggression among flock members shouldn't be an issue under normal circumstances. Obviously, there can be problems if new birds are introduced to existing ones, but that applies to all breeds. It's worth noting, though, that mature, large fowl males can get very possessive about their females, so care is needed if you're dealing with established groups. Bantams can be equally feisty, but they obviously carry less weight so don't pose such a potential threat.

Finally, on the practical side, it's good to know that the Ancona is a tough bird with regard to illness and disease. It's not especially prone to any of the common ailments, and even seems strangely resistant to the attentions of lice and mites.

Above: New keepers are often surprised by the brown and yellow colouring of Ancona chicks. They turn from this to a magpie-like colour scheme before assuming their final markings at about the six-month mark.

Below: The rosecomb Ancona is extremely rare now, in both bantam and large forms. Currently there are just three breeders in the UK.

OWNERS' VIEW: PHIL SMEDLEY

"I was raised on a farm and we always had lots of chickens. My mum used to have a flock of laying hens, but also reared turkeys and geese for Christmas. In those days I always had a few bantams of my own, but I can distinctly remember being given some birds which included one black and white pullet. This, I later discovered, was an Ancona

"Ever since that first pullet arrived, I've been drawn to the breed because of its distinct markings. I bought my first trio from an advert in *Poultry World* magazine, and won my first prize card with those birds back in 1967! I haven't been without Anconas since.

"I have both large and bantam varieties at the moment, and also keep a few bantam Orpingtons (buff and white). The latest addition to my flock are some Belgian Barbu de Watermaels; my first venture into True Bantams. But the Ancona remains my favourite.

"Contrary to popular belief, I find the Ancona one of the easiest breeds to keep. They thrive in most conditions, and will forage far and wide if out on free range. Young stock can be quite nervous and flighty but, once they reach maturity and get to know their surroundings, they become very tame and inquisitive.

"I also enjoyed great show success with my Anconas over the years, and have won most of the trophies on offer at the annual Club Show at least once. But my most notable wins include Champion Large Light Breed at the Poultry Club National Show on three occasions and Supreme Show Champion at The Royal Show.

"My advice for would-be Ancona keepers is that, if you're wanting a breed for exhibition, then it's a challenge. There are many characteristics to get right, so you'll need to hatch plenty of birds to get a decent, show specimen.

"However, it's a challenge that's well worth taking, and the results will more than make up for all that hard work. Alternatively, if it's a bird to look stunning against a green garden backdrop, then the Ancona is second to none. Well kept examples will produce a good quantity of white eggs, and thrive and forage enthusiastically in most situations."

So, there you have it. The Ancona is certainly a breed with much to offer the back garden keeper. While it may not be the laying phenomenon it once was, its ruggedness, independence of spirit and ease of ownership must surely go a long way to making up for reduced egg numbers.

The breed is also a deserving cause from a conservation point of view. It would certainly benefit from greater awareness and more keepers. What's more, at about £15 per bantam and £20 or so for a large fowl version, a small group of Anconas isn't exactly going to break the bank.

ANCONA SUPPORT

For anyone thinking about keeping Anconas, looking to buy stock or simply wanting to find out more about this interesting and engaging breed, then joining The Ancona Club is a must. You can find out how to do so by getting in touch with Phil Smedley, by telephone on 01904 468387, or via email to: phil.boy@virgin.net

ANDY MARSHALL

Andy's been involved with chickens since he was a boy, is now a respected breeder and a very successful exhibitor

Andy's DIARY

There's security at last for **Andy Marshall** and his re-located chicken flock, so now his thoughts are turning to the winter weather ahead

At last we have the exterior fox fence up! It took them eight days, but I'm delighted with the result. The invoice, when it arrives, is likely to be another matter!

However, to help balance the shock of the eventual cost, I'm sure the investment will make day-to-day management easier, and give the birds the opportunity to enjoy their surroundings as safely as is possible.

One key aspect was what to do with the three, large gates and how to ensure they were fox-proof, easy on the eye and stopped the hens flying out? In the end, we settled on using some weld mesh sheets with an electric wire over the top.

Above: I'm pleased with the way the main fencing has gone up. The big gates have been fitted with strong, weld mesh panels and an electrified wire over the top.

Left: A chicken wire 'skirt' at the base of the main fence has been buried to guard against digging predators.

Weld mesh has the advantage of being sufficiently strong to stop foxes trying to force their way through, under the gate; well, that's the theory, only time will tell if this approach is truly effective.

Now my attention is turning to pen layout and the provision of shade. The latter will be offered by fruit trees, and currently I'm considering traditional apple varieties, including some old Devon favourites. In the meantime, there are some sheep in the field that are grazing-off all the long, autumn grass before the interior fences are erected.

As I predicted a few months ago, the 'brown tops' have finally gone broody, although not when I wanted them to, which was two months ago! They've successfully hatched a brood which are either brown or white. When you cross a white Silkie male with a Light Sussex female, the resultant chicks are sex-linked; white males and brown females (hence the name, 'brown tops').

The chicks just hatched are from the Silkie x Sussex cross females, mated back to a white Silkie, and are either brown or white. So I'll be interested to see if the same, sex-linked principle applies. The Silkie male is just as proud of his babies as the broodies, so I plan to leave them all together and see how things go.

I'm always humbled to discover just how many people read this magazine, and my diary. Recently, our daughter – Isabella – was on one of her rotations with three other students in Dorset, and discovered that one of them, Nick, was an avid *PP* reader. It's always great to hear that another soon-to-be-vet has a real interested in domestic chickens.

Moving house to a different region does mean that, as we enter the winter, I've no idea what the South West weather will do. Our property is 600' above sea level, so I'm expecting the winds to be strong.

We're lucky to have a good, thick hedge for shelter right down the side of the poultry pens, so I'm hoping this will be sufficient to prevent any of the sheds or cockerel pens being blown over. Once again, time will tell.

Finally, I'd like to pass on a useful tip to help avoid the frustration caused by frozen drinkers this winter. The typical green or red drinking fonts can be an absolute nightmare to deal with in frosty weather, and are so easily damaged when they freeze.

My solution is to switch to plastic washing-up bowls bought from the local pound store. They are much easier to empty out in the evening, to prevent freezing but, if you forget to do this and find one solid with ice in the morning, simply turn it over, slosh on some hot water and the ice block will simply drop out on to the ground.

When refilling during freezing weather, always remember to use cold water, not warm. Although counter-intuitive, warm water actually freezes more quickly than cold.

Washing-up bowls are fine for large fowl, but too big for small bantams. So I used seed trays (without drainage holes!) for the latter. Another trick is to keep an old washing-up brush handy. Once they get too soft for the kitchen, they're ideal for giving poultry drinkers a quick scrub round when changing the water. The birds will certainly appreciate your efforts.

> I'm always humbled to discover just how many people read this magazine, and my diary.

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The Gallery

Send in your favourite poultry picture and be in with a chance of winning a copy of *Getting started with chickens* *

▲Hey don't leave me out! Here are Winnie, Lottie and Dolly. **Ali Wotton, Plymouth**

▶Here's my lavender Orpington, named Olaf. **Julie Cockroft, via email**

▲This is Charlotte (9) with her cute, Pekin bantam chick that she's named Lavender. **Viv Moore, Norfolk.**

▼Here are Roo, Snowdrop, Petal and Lilly trying to reach the best leaves...

This is my Araucana rooster, called Barney. **Sharlene Chick, via email**

▲...while these are my Guinea fowl enjoying foraging. **Harvey Hedges, Oxford**

▲This is my Nero hybrid hen, who sadly passed away in July.
Alasdair O'Brien, Renfrewshire, Scotland

▲My little 'big' brother, Anthony, with his little Pekin bantam playing on the climbing frame!
Sion Evans (18), Clynnog Fawr, N. Wales

▲This is Edith, one of our Red Star hens, perched on our garden chair wondering how she's going to get back down.
Anwen Braithwaite, Swansea

▼This is Poppy the lavender Pekin at four months old, wondering what's for dinner. **Fiona Wilson, Wiltshire**

PRIZE-WINNING PICS!

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✉ **Post** a print to the editor: The Gallery, Practical Poultry, Kelsey Publishing Ltd, Cudham, Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham TN16 3AG or email a digital image to: **pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk**

Remember to supply details of what's in the picture, who took it and where you're from.

▲Here's my lovely hen, called Lucky, soaking up the autumn sun.
Kelly Crowley, Gravesend, Kent

▶Me and my chickens, Amber, Ginger and Bluebell. They've been in the family since March and are very good egg layers. Bluebell is the boss, but is also the most nervous around strangers! They share the garden with our three cats, rabbit and Guinea pig.
Jemima Hepburne-Scott, Age 13, Reading

Feeding waterfowl

Reader Maryam Hope raises some interesting issues surrounding the presence and well-being of waterfowl in public parks.

In recent years I've been feeding the Canada geese and mallard ducks at a park near me in Birmingham, where there are several lakes with islands. I give the birds duck/goose pellets and starter crumbs three or four times a week.

Sometimes visitors are surprised to discover that the Council doesn't feed this sizeable flock of waterfowl, geese and ducks. These birds have to rely on the public's bread and what they can graze, and it's not always easy for them to survive.

In spring and early summer Herring gulls and crows attack ducklings and goslings when they're very small, and so the little families in the water are afraid to feed after a day or two, and disappear rapidly unless fed.

I'm wondering why nobody has designed a floating feeder, particularly for the young duckings and goslings that are too small to scramble up the bank to feed.

A floating table, or little food house, that could be tethered to the bank for the baby birds and their mother would be great. Pet shops seem to be full of cat and dog items and feeds, cages and fish tanks, but there's little or nothing for poultry and waterfowl pets.

I think that Canada geese could make very good pets as they're full of character and very friendly. They're interesting, too, and always try to be good parents (both the father and the mother) defending their goslings.

But they're not popular with commercial farmers, I gather; is that why dog owners are often contemptuous of waterfowl and people who feed them? Some people laugh when their dogs chase grazing birds into the water, even though there may be injured birds among the flock, baby birds or females carrying eggs.

Why is it that seabirds get all the attention? Seabirds, as birds of prey, are probably responsible for the decline of Shell ducks and Barnacle geese, as they would eat the eggs and attack the babies. The RSPCA are sometimes called to the park, but they only ever seem to put injured birds down.

Herring gulls frequent the park, feeding on bread that's thrown into the water. But such birds also feed on refuse disposal sites, and carry the Salmonella virus. Of course, the bread is intended for the geese, ducks, swans, coots and little moorhens. Also, I've seen anglers feeding pork luncheon meat to the geese and fish.

A few years ago they had firework displays in the park near the lakes and, of course, the birds would have been terrified. I also worried about pollution in the water. Without rain, what's in the lakes gets unpleasant and the birds go off their food. In fact, it poisons the fish.

> I can't see anything wrong with the idea of a public park for waterfowl, instead of for dogs.

The grassy area where the geese graze, called 'the arena' is mowed very short and has recently been used as the venue for a fairground, a car rally and a pop concert; so 'grassy' isn't really the word now.

But it's the geese who are the residents; it's their home territory. If they are fed they are far more likely to stay, but I'd like to know why some people are so keen on driving them away?

My idea is for a trial period in which dogs are banned from the park. If this goes well, gets a good response from the public and the birds benefit, then it could remain in force.

I can't see anything wrong with the idea of a public park for waterfowl, instead of for dogs. Environmentalists complain about the public being out of touch with nature, but it looks as if local councils are too bureaucratic and get in the way of change. Many members of the public have told me I'm 'doing a good job' with my feeding, and that I should 'keep it up'.

Surely it would be far more educational to give the young people a real interest in birds such as waterfowl – including visiting geese, ducks, swans – at Canon Hill Park and elsewhere, where lakes are.

I think that this is an important, waterfowl-related welfare issue that needs publicity, and I'd be interested to hear what other *Practical Poultry* readers think.

The waterfowl that Maryam Hope feeds in her local park in Birmingham deserve more care and attention as far as she's concerned.

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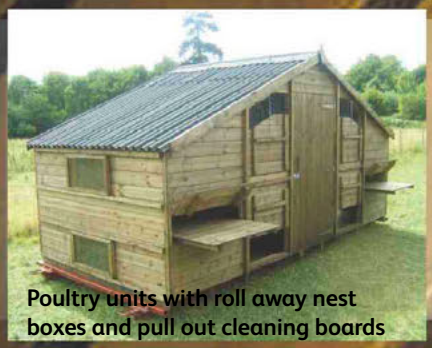

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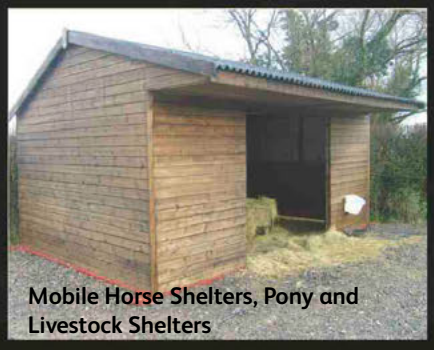

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A cracking idea!

Chicken keepers should be planting trees; it's good for their birds and the environment and, as the Woodland Trust points out, it's easy enough for us all to have a go!

Trees offer a number of significant benefits to chickens. The natural cover they provide can be a real benefit to free-ranging hens, and a new campaign organised by the Woodland Trust – the UK's leading woodland conservation charity – is looking for people who will get involved in time for the latest planting season that will run to the end of March 2015.

No matter how many chickens you own, and how healthy they already are, planting trees will heighten their happiness even more, and improve their overall quality of life.

Natural habitat

The domestic chicken is a sub-species of the red Jungle Fowl, whose natural habitat is woody scrub. So wooded environments provided by trees replicate some of the conditions that encourage natural behaviours linked to the chicken's ancestry, including foraging, scratching and dust-bathing.

Well-designed tree planting encourages better use of the range by providing cover, shelter and shade. However, to be effective, tree cover should be available close to the housing, as hens are always reluctant to cross open ground.

Chickens are happiest and feel most in a wooded environment.

Chickens that are able to express more natural behaviour by roaming and foraging among trees, are also less likely to either peck – or be pecked – by others, which can cause welfare issues.

John Tucker, woodland creation director at the Woodland Trust, said: "When combining increased range, more natural foraging behaviour and less injurious feather pecking, chickens are much less likely to suffer stress. This then significantly improves egg quality, with hens laying fewer second grade and pale eggs – a fantastic benefit for both chicken and owner."

There are also a number of pollution-related benefits associated with tree planting. Trees will absorb ammonia which is released into the atmosphere, and help reduce rainwater run-off and the potential for contamination of water courses.

Chickens that range further will also lead to a reduced risk of parasite spread, as they won't be confined to a restricted area. The density of droppings will also be less, meaning chickens are less likely to ingest nematode eggs and become infected.

> "Well-designed tree planting encourages better use of the range by providing cover, shelter and shade.

However, it isn't just your hens that'll appreciate being able to roam among the trees. New trees and areas of woodland – particularly when planted near existing woodland – are also of significant importance to wildlife, as they act as buffers and extensions of habitats already established.

Attractive prospect

Newly-created woodland attracts an abundance of insects that travel between trees and entice birds, which may then be encouraged to start living there. Insects can also attract foraging bats; up to nine species of these have been found to use even very early-stage woodland.

John Tucker continued: "Woodland is one of our richest habitats, and when planted – particularly next to existing ancient woodland – will help create more spaces for wildlife, and provide a long-term home for a number of insects, birds and mammals. A sign that birds are living in your trees is simply hearing them – a wonderful sound that's enough to cheer anyone up on what might otherwise appear to be a dull day!"

We should all be planting trees, both for the long-term benefit of our chickens and for the environment.

Tree planting: a step-by-step guide

Although specialists from the Woodland Trust offer practical advice to people who apply to plant trees, here's a quick guide on how to put your trees in the ground

- Use a spade to take the turf out of the ground, turn it over and split it almost in half
- Dig a hole slightly wider and deeper than the roots of your tree. Loosen the soil around the edges
- Put the tree in the hole and check the depth. Look for the 'collar' – the mark on the tree from where it originally started to grow above ground. This should be level with the top of the soil. If a tree is planted too deep, the stem may rot; too shallow and the roots above ground will die
- Hold the tree upright and gently push back the soil, pressing it down on to the roots. Don't compact the soil as this will stop water and air circulation, but make sure your tree is steady
- Put the turf back over the hole with the split either side of the young tree, grass side down
- Cover your tree with a guard if necessary, using a cane or stake to provide extra support

> The Woodland Trust is encouraging people to plant trees as part of its commitment to increase the UK's woodland cover.

The Woodland Trust is encouraging people to plant trees as part of its commitment to increase the UK's woodland cover. Managing existing woodland to make sure it's protected and restored, where needed, are also other aims of the charity that works to inspire people up and down the country to visit woods, plant trees and enjoy the many benefits that woodland has to offer.

If you're interested in planting trees on your land, you can do so by applying to the Woodland Trust and, depending on where you live and how many trees you want to plant, you'll be advised on the best scheme to take advantage of.

Larger scale

MOREwoods is an initiative designed to support larger-scale tree planting projects, such as small woods or scattered plantings covering at least half a hectare (1.25 acres). However, land doesn't have to be in one block – field corners, shelterbelts or strips of land can be combined to meet the minimum requirement.

As part of this scheme, advisors from the Woodland Trust offer expert advice and guidance on creating your new, native woodland. Funding is available if you are willing to contribute to the costs which, together with the most suitable tree species and where to plant them, are discussed as part of visits made to those who apply.

If it's just a few trees for chickens within your garden, these can be bought from the Woodland Trust's native tree shop. However, if you want to plant on public land with a community, school or youth group, then the Trust's free tree packs scheme could be more appropriate.

John added: "Overall, a well-designed tree planting scheme, which provides good canopy cover, is the most practical and sustainable method to encourage hens to range further, and provides opportunities for species-specific behaviours such as foraging.

"The Woodland Trust has created thousands of acres of new woodland across the UK, and I hope that people continue to be inspired to work with us and plant their own trees.

I would certainly encourage any chicken keepers who are interested, to contact the Trust to find out how they can create their own wooded areas, to not only benefit their chickens, but also the land and local environment in general."

Without decent top cover provided by trees, hens feel reluctant to stray far from the security of their house, which places increased loading on the immediate area.

CASE STUDY: JOHN DANIEL

John Daniel, a partner in RN Creasy Farming Partnership near Eye, Suffolk, allows his chickens to roam among trees, and is a great believer in the benefits they offer to his birds.

He is currently in the process of extending existing wooded areas on his land by planting new trees across two hectares. These will be supplied as part of the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme, and will not only benefit John's chickens, but also improve local wildlife by connecting areas of already-mature trees.

He said: "Although our land has some areas of newly-established, native woodland, we plan to increase this with further native trees, and are looking forward to planting from the wide range of species – including hazel, beech and walnut – that will provide even further areas for the chickens to range.

"Trees offer a number of significant benefits to chickens, which were originally a woodland species, and are a useful management tool for anyone who owns them.

"The cover provided by the trees facilitates a happier flock by encouraging the chickens to range more freely, providing natural foraging as well as shelter from the weather and predatory birds. Plus they are helping to keep the whole range in good condition by encouraging wider use of the land area.

"Planting new saplings among existing, mature trees will also create wildlife corridors, allowing species to flourish and thrive within them. Areas managed by traditional rotational coppice will provide a supply of wood for heating too – cutting down on energy bills – and natural materials for hedge laying rods, for example.

"Trees have certainly improved the living conditions for my chickens. The fact they look beautiful, offer a habitat for an abundance of wildlife species and provide sustainable energy supplies are added bonuses, which makes the effort of planting them even more worthwhile."

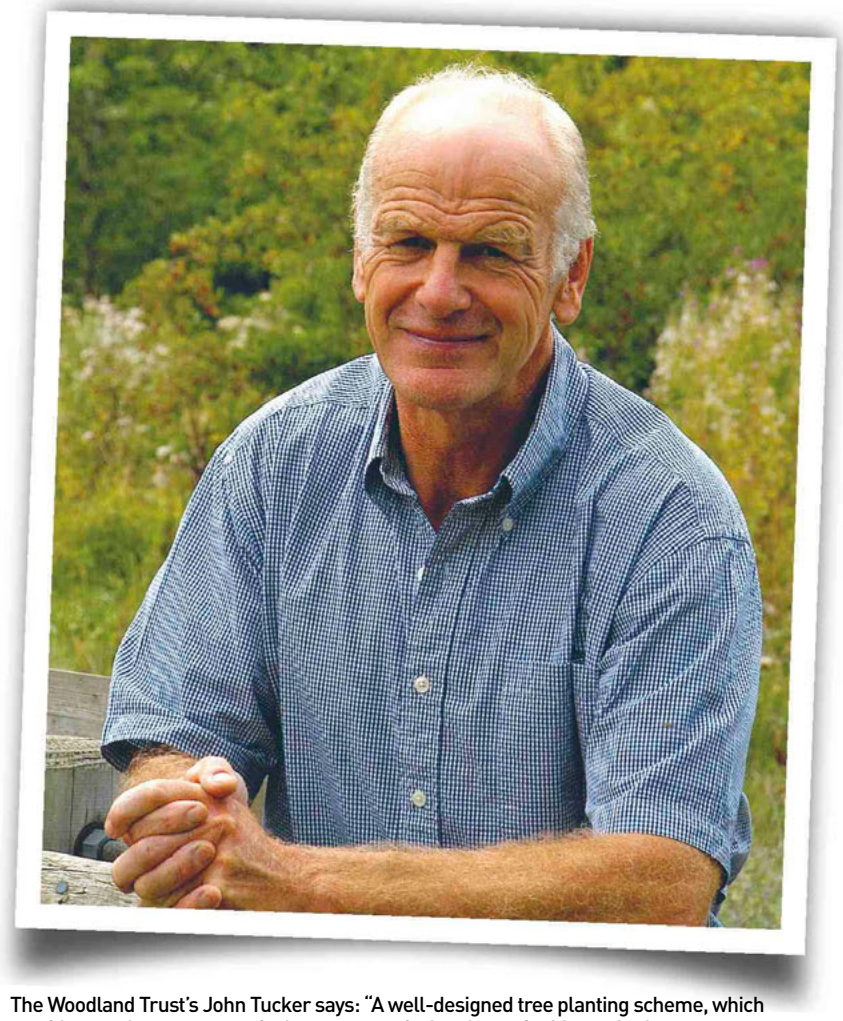
Tree maintenance tips

Once your trees are planted, it's really important to maintain them. Don't worry as this won't take up too much time

- During the first five years, you will need to monitor them every month to check they're healthy, manage their guards and prune.
- Pruning can reduce damage caused by birds trying to roost on lower branches which aren't strong enough to take their weight, and prevents ground vegetation growing into lower branches which may lead to hens laying eggs outside.
- From year 10 onwards, depending on how many trees you've planted, you may need to carry out some thinning. This will make sure light continues to reach the ground so your chickens' foraging area isn't too dark, and they continue to roam there.

More information

To find out more about the advice and support available from the Woodland Trust about planting trees to benefit hens, call 01476 452356, send and email to: plant@woodlandtrust.org.uk or visit the website at: www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees



The Woodland Trust's John Tucker says: "A well-designed tree planting scheme, which provides good canopy cover, is the most practical and sustainable method to encourage hens to range further."

Gift aid!

From stocking fillers to full-blown presents, here's our round-up of some quirky chicken-themed Christmas gift ideas.

> Quintessential country house coasters for lovers of the rural good life.

1. Cody Foster & Co, an American folk art brand from Nebraska, make these lovely vintage-style tree decorations which more than hint at Americana and a 1950s vibe. All handmade, many are crafted from recycled materials.

The Nesting Speckled Hen Ornament is one glamorous lady – made from glass and featuring gold glitter on her back and all over her nest, she's bound to prove a talking point when hanging from your tree! Available in cream or orange. Hangs from silver thread. **Dimensions:** 10 x 10 x 9cm **Material:** glass & wood **Tel:** 01386 853331 **Price:** £9.99 **www.cotswoldtrading.com**

2. This sitting hen soap sits with her three soap eggs on a bed of straw in a white porcelain dish. The natural, vegetable-based soaps have a gorgeous, fresh linen fragrance.

Presented in a beautiful ribboned gift box with letterpress printing. **www.annabeljames.co.uk** is an online boutique selling gorgeous gifts, beautifully wrapped and delivered. **Price:** £23.95. **Tel:** 0845 548 0210

3. Sophie Allport's 'Chickens' hob covers feature Sophie's illustrations of adorable speckled Marans on a sage grey background.

These covers are suitable for Agas, and are part of a wider range including napkins, tea towels, oven gloves, tablecloths, tea cosies, egg cosies, peg bags and much more! 38cm diameter. 100% cotton. Machine washable. **Price:** £11.00 each **Tel:** 0845 0177866 **www.sophieallport.com**

4. Quintessential country house coasters for lovers of the rural good life.

This set of four, natural coasters is decorated with white hens and comes in a beautiful, wooden presentation box making them ideal for a present, or practical to tidy away if you don't want to leave them out on the table. 10cm x 10cm. **Price:** £8.00, **The Contemporary Home**, **Tel:** 02392 469400, **www.tch.net**

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A natural, cotton tote bag featuring a striking Chickens illustration originally drawn in ink and watercolour.

6. These pretty patchwork egg cups are a perfect way to serve your morning egg, and would make a great stocking-filler. When not in use they brighten up a shelf, dresser or windowsill, or can even double-up as an unusual tea light holder.

A gorgeous country kitchen style gift, especially when given with a pretty egg cosy. **Height:** 5.5cm,
Price: £6.00. **The Contemporary Home**
Tel: 02392 469400. **www.tch.net**

7. We love this funky little jug. Small but perfectly formed at 18cm tall, it would make a great addition to a festive breakfast table. Cream ceramic. **Price:** £12.00
The Contemporary Home
Tel: 02392 469400. **www.tch.net**

8. The ideal gift for those who cook with style and love country themes and elements, the Cornish Hen range includes complementary products such as tea cosies, tea towels, aprons, cushions, table cloths and oilcloth.

The Cornish Hen design is part of the Country Girl, collection and is available in other designs. Made in the UK, available in 18 designs/colours, 100% half panama cotton. Washes beautifully on a standard cycle.
Dimensions: 80 cm x 15cm
Price: £15.00. **Tel:** 07886988152
www.bettyboyns.co.uk

9. Charming Cornish Hen mug. Made in the UK and dishwasher-safe. Also available in matching goose, pig and rabbit designs.
Price: £8.50 **Tel:** 07886 988152
www.bettyboyns.co.uk

10. A natural, cotton tote bag featuring a striking Chickens illustration, originally drawn in ink and watercolour. This environmentally friendly bag is made from 100%, 4oz, natural fair trade cotton, and is a perfect accessory for the eco-minded shopper! Long handles make it easy to carry or sling over your shoulder, and it can be folded up and stored in a pocket or handbag ready to be used whenever needed. The heat-applied image allows for a vibrant and durable design. **Price:** £6.95 **Ceridwen Hazelchild Design ceridwendesign.etsy.com**

Christmas goodies

> The new Sophie Allport 'Chicken' doorstop is a perfect Christmas gift.

11. Fun egg-shaped kitchen timer. Up to 60-minute countdown. These timers are mechanical and don't require batteries; they store the energy required to ring the bell when you set the time. **Price:** £5.95 **Tel:** 01255 223322 **kitchenbuddies.co.uk**

12. The new Sophie Allport 'Chicken' doorstop is a perfect Christmas gift. It's covered in the Sophie Allport 'Chicken' fabric and matches beautifully with the rest of the 'Chicken' range. Also available in the Sophie Allport 'Labrador' and 'Terrier' print, if there's a dog-lover in the family. **Details:** 1.5kg. 32 x 27cm **Price:** £30.00 **Tel:** 0845 0177866 **www.sophieallport.com**

13. This practical garden apron is fantastically useful for keeping those tools close at hand while gardening or chickeneering! Made from matt oilcloth (PVC), the apron is durable and water-resistant. It has four handy pockets at the front to keep all those outdoor essentials easily accessible. The cotton straps can be adjusted to fit all shapes and sizes around the waist.

Apron dimensions: 68cm (width), 38cm (height). Fabric waist strap: 4.5cm (width) x 250cm (length). Two deep front pockets: 30cm (width) x 25cm (height). Two smaller front pockets: 15cm (width) x 15cm (height). Handy hanging loop on waistband. **Price:** £15.00 **Tel:** 0845 0177866 **www.sophieallport.com**

14. This shabby chic metal sign is gloss finished and made of aluminium. Great indoors or outdoors. Why not pop one on your chicken house? Available with sticky adhesive tape or pre-drilled with screw caps. 8x10in. **Price:** £4.65 **www.etsy.com/uk/shop/DukeGifts**

15. Artist Bex Williams has come up with this striking chicken design, available in a range of products, any one of which would make a great Christmas gift.

All products made in the UK and from sustainable resources. Shipping from £0.90, with free shipping on orders over £30. **www.wraptious.com/collections/bex-williams**

A: **Prints:** Chicken prints are available in A4 to A1 sizes. Fine quality giclée prints on smooth, 300gsm matt paper, with 12 pigments. Great quality prints and the colours don't fade in 100 years! **A4** = £17.95 **A3** = £24.95 **A2** = £44.95 (free shipping) **A1** = £79.95 (free shipping)

B: **Greeting cards:** These greeting cards are A6, and come with a recycled kraft envelope. Printed in the UK on FSC card. £2 each. Three cards for £5.

C: **Notebooks:** Spiralbound A5 and A6 notebooks, with 50 blank white pages. They have a lovely matte cover that's really tactile to the touch. Would make a great gift for anyone prone to keeping notes, sketches, doodles or recipes. Perfect for Christmas stocking fillers too!
A5 = £5.50 **A6** = £3.50

D: **Mugs:** Perfect for that Christmas morning mug of coffee or tea. Dishwasher-proof to over 1,000 washes. £9.50 each, with second mug half-price!

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Ray & Frankie Dowden, Cambridge, UK. February 2014

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TOP CHOICE

Useful broodies

Chris Graham suggests that, if you're looking for a broody hen, you don't always have to pick from the most common options to get good results with natural incubation.

As we plough headlong into winter, with all the aggravation and disruption that's sure to bring, it's good to know that there are still things to look forward to; treats in store for the coming spring, the prospect of which help us all keep going through the dark months.

One of the most enticing is the prospect of hatching chicks and seeing the youngsters scratching around on fresh grass in bright, spring sunshine. It's an appealing idea for sure, and one that's made all the most desirable if you're able to use a broody hen.

Dedicated delight

Watching an attentive mother marshalling her brood as they take their first, tentative steps outside the broody coop is a delight indeed. But, with so much emphasis placed on the use of incubators nowadays, it's all too easy to overlook the fact that these machines – convenient though they undoubtedly are – actually offer a completely artificial incubation option.

Mother Nature's solution, an approach that's truly stood the test of time, was to have a hen lay a clutch of eggs and then sit on them until they hatched. Hence the adoption of the term 'sitter', when referring to hens which developed a reputation for being especially good at this important job.

But the successful hatching of eggs doesn't simply involve sitting on them. During the incubation period, the bird will rotate the eggs on a regular basis, alter their positions within the clutch and also maintain just the right levels of temperature and humidity to ensure that the chicks both develop and hatch correctly.

Of course, our 'exploitation' of the chicken – be it as an egg-laying machine or a feathery show bird – over the past 100 years or so, has done much to hinder this natural ability to hatch in many breeds.

The general rule always used to be that the heavy, docile breeds of American and Asiatic origins – plus the Indian Game, Dorking and Sussex from the UK – were the recognised 'sitters'. These birds were in marked contrast to the largely Mediterranean-sourced light breeds which, thanks to their flightier, more excitable characters, proved less reliable as sitters and, as such, weren't favoured for this purpose.

Over the years, though, as breeds have been changed (especially by exhibitors in the case of the heavies), there's been

Croad Langshan

This is a breed that's all too often overlooked by enthusiasts searching for a genuinely useful, broody option. It was sourced from China and first arrived in the UK in the 1870s, thanks to the efforts of Major Croad.

It's a calm and friendly bird that represents a great family option, being easy to keep, hardy and a decent layer of brown-shelled eggs (200 a year). The hens go broody and, being big, will cover 12 eggs happily.

There really are no significant disadvantages to the breed, and perhaps the only factor that might limit their appeal for some keepers is the lack of coloured plumage options.

- **Origin: China**
- **Weights:**
  Male, 4.10kg (9lb)
  Female, 3.20kg (7lb)
  Bantam male, 770-910g (27-32oz)
  Bantam female, 650-790g (23-28oz)
- **Egg laying:** 200pa
- **Colours:** Black or white

BUYING BIRDS

Croad Langshan Club of Great Britain
Mrs L Heigl, tel: 01420 511555
Email: lynh@croadlangshan.org.uk
www.mikek.org.uk/croadclubsite

Right: The Croad Langshan loves an outdoor lifestyle, and will happily tolerate all sorts of climatic conditions. It's an impressive layer yet a good broody too; a great all-rounder!

a tendency for a good number of them to loose their broody characteristics. While the latest edition of the *British Poultry Standards* includes a handy list of 35 breeds which are classified as 'sitters', the reality is somewhat different. In practice, a significant number of these show very little tendency to sit at all these days.

Reliable performers?

The five featured here, though, are all capable of sitting patiently for the 21 days required to hatch their eggs reliably. However, there will certainly be differences in performance from strain to strain, so you'll need to take care when buying your birds.

Take the time and trouble to research the breed you pick before you buy. Never source birds 'blind' and, wherever possible, access the relevant breed club or society and ask for a recommendation.

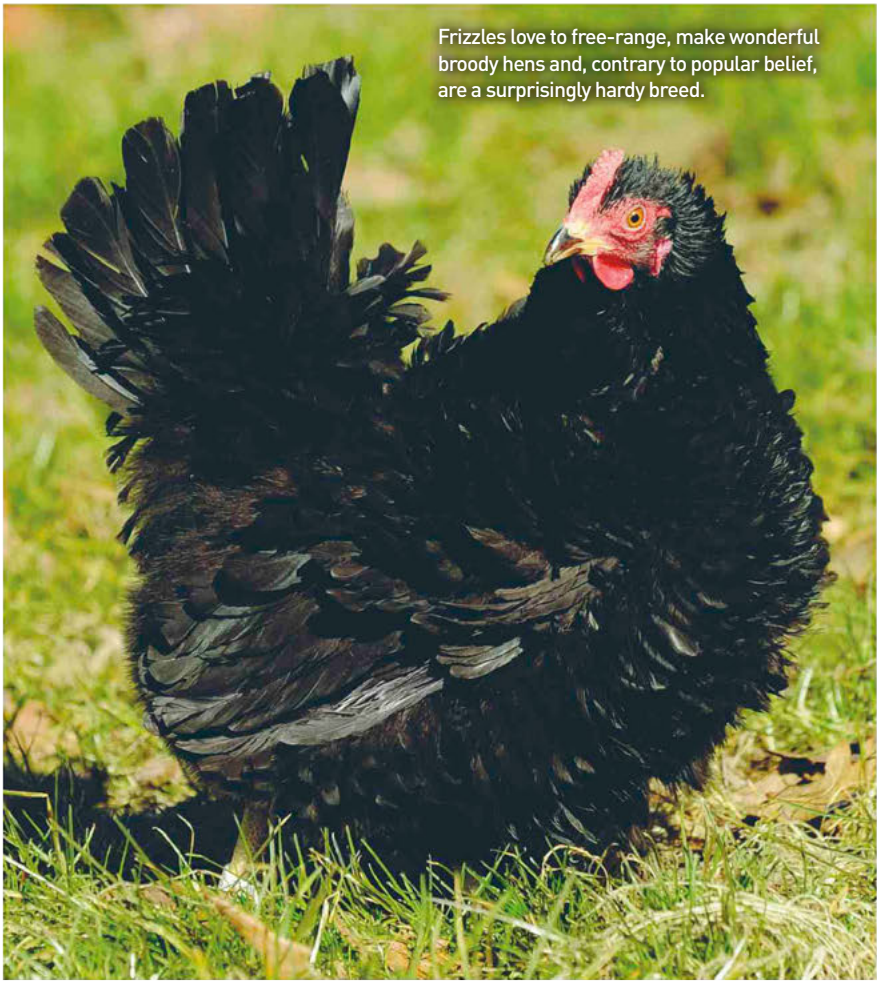
Visit the breeder suggested and make sure that you ask specifically about the broodiness potential of the hens you're buying. There are few things more disheartening than seeing a sitting hen desert her nest just a few days before the eggs are due to hatch.

Hopefully the variety of breeds gathered here will contain something to satisfy most tastes; from those who crave something unusual like the Frizzle, to others who are just as happy with a straightforward, conventional option such as the Rhode Island Red.

Of course, no article about broody hens would ever be complete without the inclusion of the Silkie, so that's in here. This is an unusual breed in itself, with its fine, hair-like feathers giving it a unique appearance that belies its prowess as they mother of all broody mothers.

The remaining four breeds include the Croad Langshan, another appealing breed with a down-to-earth, cope-with-anything kind of attitude that endears it to its band of dedicated followers. There's also the Scots Dumpy which, as well as offering brilliant broody potential, is available in an almost limitless array of plumage colours and patterns.

However, all five are certainly very individual birds; each has a characteristic look and a unique appeal of its own. Any one of them would represent a sensible choice and you've got a few months from now in which to make up your mind before the 2015 natural brooding season begins. Good luck and happy hatching!


Frizzles love to free-range, make wonderful broody hens and, contrary to popular belief, are a surprisingly hardy breed.

TOP CHOICE
Much hardier than they look

Frizzle

While the Frizzle is certainly an unusual breed, and its looks won't be to everyone's taste, the females go broody at the drop of a hat! They are incredibly reliable when sitting, too, and it's even been suggested that they perform better than the legendary Silkie in this respect.

Contrary to popular belief, these birds can play a useful role in the back garden environment, offering a worthwhile degree of utility performance (170 eggs a year), coupled to an engaging character and surprising level of hardiness. Sourcing stock is likely to be the biggest problem.

- **Origin:** Asia
- **Weight:** **Male,** 3.60kg (8lb)
  Female, 2.70kg (6lb)
  Bantam male, 680-790g (24-28oz)
  Bantam female, 570-680g (20-24oz)
- **Egg laying:** 170pa
- **Colours:** White, black, blue, buff, cuckoo, spangle, pile, Columbian, red, black-red (partridge-bred), black-red (wheaten-bred), brown-red, silver duckwing, gold duckwing, mottled, crele, barred, silver.

BUYING BIRDS

The Frizzle Society of Great Britain
Alex Hales, tel: 07980 855544
Email: ahales2010@live.com
www.thefrizzlesocietyofgreatbritain.co.uk

Rhode Island Red

This famous American breed is perhaps the king of the dual-purpose birds, combining good egg laying performance with useful meat-producing qualities. It was also used as a breeding foundation for many of today's hybrid hens.

Being inherently docile and easy to live with, the RIR offers less experienced keepers a great pure-breed option. While not available in a range of colours, its traditional looks and all-round hardiness ensure its continuing popularity.

The hens make good broodies, although can be a little clumsy at times, so some breeders make use of them as reliable hatchers of thicker-shelled duck and goose eggs.

- **Origin:** USA
- **Weight** **Male,** 3.85kgs (8.5lb)
  Female, 2.95kgs (6.5lb)
  Bantam male, 790-910g (28-32oz)
  Bantam female, 680-790g (24-28oz)
- **Egg laying** 170pa
- **Colours:** Rich brown/black

BUYING BIRDS

The Rhode Island Red Club
Richard Everatt, tel: 07809 112920
Email: richard.everatt@tiscali.co.uk

Size can sometimes cause a brooding issue with the Rhode Island Red, but they remain a wonderfully traditional all-rounder, and great for hatching thicker-shelled duck and geese eggs.

There's no mistaking the characteristic shape and feather form of the Silkie. The breed has a temperament that's ideally suited to hatching and rearing young.

Silkie

The instantly recognisable Silkie enjoys a reputation for being perhaps the number one broody hen. It's so good, in fact, that many poultry keepers who aren't even particular Silkie enthusiasts, always make sure they have a hen or two on hand specifically for hatching duties.

But there's more to the breed than just its broodiness. These birds are wonderfully docile, non-fliers, easy to handle and offer a truly unique appearance. However, a word of warning. The fine feathering can cause problems for young chicks (tangling), plus the breed is prone to Marek's disease and mites.

- **Origin:** Asia
- **Weights:** **Male,** 1.81kg (4lb)
  Female, 1.36kg (3lb)
  Bantam male, 600g (22oz)
  Bantam female, 500g (18oz)
- **Egg laying:** Fewer than 100pa
- **Colours:** Black, blue, gold, white, partridge

BUYING BIRDS

The Silkie Club of Great Britain
Gabbie Franklin, tel: 07875 535 619
Email: gabzfranklin@yahoo.co.uk

Scots Dumpy

The quaintly-named Scots Dumpy is probably most famous for its short legs. Yet it's a large fowl that produces medium-sized, tinted eggs in fairly reasonable numbers (130 or so a year) over a longish laying season.

Scots Dumpy hens make very reliable broodies and extremely attentive mothers. So, if natural incubation is something that appeals to you, the Scots Dumpy will certainly prove to be a willing assistant.

However, the presence of a semi-lethal and dominant 'creeper' gene in the breed's genetic make-up complicates things from a breeding point of view, and can lead to disappointingly high levels of 'dead in shell' among those eggs which are incubated, be it naturally or artificially.

Origin: UK

Weight: **Male,** 3.20kg (7lb)
Female, 2.70kg (6lb)
Bantam male, 800g (1.75lb)
Bantam female, 675g (1.5lb)

Egg laying: Approx. 130pa

Colours: Black, cuckoo, white (most commonly), plus any other standardised colour from other breeds!

BUYING BIRDS

The Scots Dumpy Club
Toddy Hamilton-Gould, tel: 07748 088335
Email: toddyclive@towerfields.com
www.scotsdumpyclub.org.uk

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Lighting the way!

With winter upon us again and several months of dark days ahead, we revisit the interesting subject of hen house lighting to discover what can be done to boost the laying performance of your hens.

Chickens love being out in the sunshine. Daylight is an important source of vitamin D which, in turn, plays an important role in the metabolism of calcium and phosphorus. In hens, both of these are crucial for good egg shell formation.

Chickens are very sensitive to light levels, both in terms of its brightness and its effect on day length. These factors have a dramatic affect on behaviour because they stimulate the production of different hormones and nervous responses.

Winter, with its short days and low temperatures, can lead to stoppages in egg production and low fertility. But these negative effects can be counteracted by the careful use of artificial lighting in the hen house.

Simple routines

Of course, for the typical, small-scale chicken enthusiast who keeps just a handful of hens as back garden pets, and works around the simple routine of letting out and shutting-in their birds every day, tinkering with day length won't be an essential issue. But for those keepers operating with more birds, or who are running a smallholding or breeding operation, understanding and utilising the effects of light and the economic benefits that controlling it will bring, can pay dividends.

As far as the onset of maturity is concerned, day length represents the most important aspect of light management. If you're rearing birds for meat, maximising the day length will increase growth rates dramatically, but you probably won't end up with birds suitable for laying or breeding.

By altering day length you're mimicking nature. Most birds naturally hatch and quickly mature during the long, bright days of summer. If you take note of birds in the wild, they grow at an incredible rate, and many are the size of their parents within a month. Some species, such as pheasant or partridge, can even fly within a matter of days after hatching.

It's only in the equatorial tropics that you might find birds breeding continuously throughout the year but, even the wet and dry periods have a significant effect on when

> Most birds naturally hatch and quickly mature during the long, bright days of summer.

Right: House lighting on a commercial scale is a very important issue; getting the intensity and/or colour wrong can cause all sorts of behavioural problems.

breeding occurs. As we know, domestic chickens are the descendents of the Jungle Fowl of south-east Asia; basically a tropical climate providing an almost constant 12-hour day/12-hour night sequence. Consequently, any variation from this '12-on, 12-off' pattern is, in effect, going to have an effect on the development and performance of your birds.

If you're rearing chickens for breeding or laying, there are several basic light regimes you can use. If you want your birds to lay through the winter, then you should introduce a light into your hen house and set a timeswitch so that the light produced matches summer day length (on at 5am, off at 9pm), to achieve 16 hours of 'daylight'.

Strong bones

During the rearing period, you're looking to slow down the rate of growth somewhat, so that the skeleton is given time to fully develop before the body's hormones kick in and turn the chicken into a sexually mature adult.

But there's subtlety in the system, too. Research suggests that the ideal and most efficient regime to follow for the production of laying hens starts with a long, 20-hour day length. This will ensure that the young chicks have plenty of time to feed, drink and build vitality during this vulnerable period.

Gradually, though, the daylight hours can then be reduced so that, by about six weeks of age, an eight or nine-hour-day is used to delay the onset of maturity. Then, between 16 and 18 weeks, day length is increased steadily and combined with an increase in feed so that, by 30 weeks of age, a 16-hour-day is established as the norm. This is then maintained until the end of lay. Any reduction of day length during lay, even if caused by a power cut, will cause a loss in egg production.

Of course, most back garden keepers needn't go to the trouble and expense of following such guidelines but, for those involved in the hobby more seriously, there are certainly advantages to be had by using these basic rules.

If you're a poultry breeder, you may have thought that, come November, your birds stop laying, your cockerels become infertile and that's an end to chick hatching. However, with a bit of forward planning and carefully management, there's no real reason at all why even your poorest winter-laying breeds shouldn't continue producing fertile eggs from November through to March.

> Its body is telling it that it's time to start laying, while the seasons are saying 'pack up, it's nearly winter!'

Traditionally, the vast majority of pure breed chickens are hatched during the summer months, meaning that they are approaching sexual maturity just as the days are getting shorter.

But, for a chicken's body clock this creates a false start. Its body is telling it that it's time to start laying, while the seasons are saying 'pack up, it's nearly winter!' While temperature can play some part in this, by far the most important trigger is day length.

Left to its own devices, a hen that's ready to start laying in October may not lay its first egg until the following March, then stop again during the following October. So, although it may sound completely crazy, the best time to hatch chicks is actually during October.

But for many keepers this simply isn't practical, and a high proportion of hatching eggs would be wasted. So the compromise is simply to provide a light in the winter so that summer-reared birds don't experience that sudden drop in day length that has such a detrimental effect on egg production.

How's it done?

There are three basic options: 1. All artificial; house the birds in a light-proof shed throughout the rearing period. 2 Half-and-half; delay the time free-range birds are let out of their dark house into daylight, and let them put themselves back to bed. Then, in winter, supplement natural day length with a light in the hen house. Be aware, however, that the RSPCA will want your birds let out by 9am.

The third option is to rely entirely on natural day length. Eggs are set in September, hatched in October and laying would commence in March, just as day length and temperatures are really starting to increase naturally. It's important then that day length is kept at 16 hours from this point onwards.

But there can be problems for the unwary. One of the most common is early maturity. Birds reared on too long a day from four to 16 weeks can mature too quickly, possibly leading to the skeleton not reaching its optimum size. This can also result in the production of small eggs, prolapse and poor performance generally.

A failure to lay in the winter will typically be caused by inappropriate hatch times. Birds hatched in March will start laying in July/August. But, once it gets to September/October, natural day length will start to decrease, which can lead to a fall in egg production just when the bird is reaching its maximum output (peak production). Providing a 16-hour day length with hen house lighting can go some way towards correcting this.

Genetic potential

It's important to appreciate that any chicken will only perform within the capabilities of its inherited potential. So, a Leghorn bantam is not going to reach the size of an oven-ready broiler at six weeks, even if you give it a 24-hour day.

This is why for pure breed poultry, lighting programmes will only make subtle changes to performance. Having said that, though, these subtle changes might just give you the edge in the show pen.

The initial, critical period of skeletal development in a chicken typically occurs during the first eight weeks after hatching. In fact, for many breeds, almost two-thirds of the skeletal size is gained by the eight-week mark, and day length has a huge influence on this.

Short days tend to produce a larger-framed bird that will then lead on to a greater overall size in adulthood. That's why the bigger birds in the show pen will, most likely, have been hatched early in the year when days are short. As the bird matured, day length increased and, once its skeleton had reached its inherited potential, the bird would have started to put on flesh.

Popular light sources (left to right): compact fluorescent tube, LED and conventional tungsten filament

> Short days tend to produce a larger-framed bird that will then lead on to a greater overall size.

However, for the 'dumpy' breeds (those with low carriage, such as the Pekin) where you're aiming for a small, compact body, a long day can be preferable so that early maturity prevents the skeleton from reaching its full potential size. Consequently, many Pekin breeders will wait until June/July before hatching their birds.

At a more general level, there's a fascination correlation between the intensity of ambient light and activity of chickens; if conditions are too dim, then birds will become inactive.

This isn't simply because a lack of light makes it difficult for them to see, low levels actually trigger the production of hormones which, in turn, trigger sleep the desire to sleep.

In practical terms this can be very useful for chicken keepers; it makes it easier to catch birds at night when they're drowsy, and can also be beneficial for helping to keep them calm while being transported.

Too dark inside?

On the other hand, if poultry housing is kept too dark, then birds that are kept indoors can become reluctant to feed, which will have obvious and undesirable knock-on effects on growth rates, laying performance and overall health.

So why is it that most hen houses tend to be relatively dark inside, even on the brightest of days? Well, problems can be triggered by high levels of light intensity inside the coop. There's a danger that the birds will become too stimulated and active, increasing the likelihood of fighting and

For back garden chicken keepers with just a handful of birds, hen house lighting needn't be an issue.

> Artificial light dimming is another aspect to be considered, both in terms of effect and welfare.

other destructive behaviour like feather pecking.

Trouble like this can quickly get out of hand if it's not dealt with, with cannibalism being the ultimate result. So keepers must always be on their guard for the tell-tale warning signs among birds in the house, such as pecked vents and bleeding combs or wattles. Once the blood starts flowing, then even the mildest-mannered family favourites can switch into terminator mode, and the unlucky victim can be pecked to death in a matter of hours.

However, too dark inside the hen house isn't good, either. Ambient levels that are too low inside a coop can slow everything down too much. But reining-in the onset of maturity – by keeping the levels well controlled – can be advantageous in birds being reared for laying or breeding as early maturity can lead to its own problems, including small eggs, prolapsed oviduct and insufficient skeletal development.

How bright?

Light intensity is measured in 'LUX', which represents lumens per square metre. On a normal, cloudless day, LUX levels can be anything between 10,000 and 25,000 while, in direct sunlight, levels can reach 130,000. Fortunately for us, poultry are quite happy in much lower levels of light.

Chickens in particular are native to jungle conditions, where light levels are relatively low. However, as a general rule, they shouldn't be kept at lighting levels below 4 LUX (the level at which you can still read a newspaper), for extended periods.

Laying hens will be quite happy at 20 LUX, while breeding cockerels do well with intensities between 60 and 150 LUX. Brooding chicks should be kept at at least 80 LUX. So, to put all this into practical terms, as long as you can clearly see around the poultry shed without straining your eyes, there should be enough light!

One 60W tungsten bulb (or the equivalent) is sufficient for a 6x8 foot poultry shed housing up 40 standard-sized birds (nine birds per square metre is the RSPCA's Freedom Foods Standard), so most of us can get away with a 40W light source in the domestic situation.

For those working at the more serious end of the hobby, good hen house lighting management can make a worthwhile difference to growth rates, productivity and health.

Artificial light dimming is another aspect to be considered, both in terms of effect and welfare. The RSPCA-approved Freedom Food Standards require that lights should be turned off gradually within a chicken house, rather than suddenly plunging the place into darkness.

This can either be done using an automatic dimming system, or by opting to provide all the additional light in the morning before dawn, then letting Mother Nature take care of the dimming naturally, at dusk. The latter is probably the ideal approach for the small-scale chicken keeper.

Light source comparison

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Tungsten bulb	Tungsten bulbs are cheap, readily available and can be dimmed to alter the light intensity of the house. You can get them in a variety of colours to deliver the appropriate spectrum of light you desire.	Most expensive to run, short working life, high heat output, supply becoming limited.
Fluorescent bulb	Fluorescent bulbs are readily available; they are very efficient to run and have a very long service life which offsets their initial cost. Fluorescent tubes can be bought that give different ranges along the light spectrum. Low running temperature.	Initial cost can be high and they cannot be used with a dimmer. Responsible disposal can be an issue.
LED bulb	LED lights have a very long life and are extremely cheap to run. They can sometimes be dimmed and the spectrum range has shown to have a positive affect on bird behaviour. Low running temperature.	Prices remain high, although continue to fall.

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The annual moult

Here's our quick-reference guide to moulting; an event that continues to shock and distress many new hen keepers.

What is it?

The moult is the annual shedding of tired, old feathers at the end of the season, so that they can be replaced with fresh, new ones before winter arrives.

How will I recognise it?

Different chickens will moult at different speed and to different degrees. General feather loss from the neck, tail and back are the most obvious signs, as well as many more feathers than usual on the floor of the hen house.

Are there stages involved?

The annual moult should be a gradual process of rejuvenation for a chicken. Feathers tend to be replaced in a fixed sequence which ensures that the birds will never be completely bald. As a general rule, feathers are lost in the following order: head and neck, saddle, breast, body, wing secondaries, wing primaries and tail.

How long will it take?

The moulting process can all be over for the fittest, best laying birds in three or four weeks, or it might take as long as two or three months for older, non-utility pure-breds. It can't be rushed!

Are there any potential problems?

Apart from the shocking appearance, keepers should be aware that the moult represents a major drain on the system. Egg production typically stops and dietary tonics and vitamin supplements can help. Segregating males at this time (or using poultry saddles on hens) can help to avoid treading damage on bare skin. Always be wary of the risk of pecking damage, too. New feather growth can be a tempting prospect for flock mates. Isolate any birds that get wounded in this way.

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Isolation unit?

From time to time I need to isolate a hen due to illness, bullying or some other reason. I have a separate pen, but not a spare coop to go in it.

Do you know of anyone who sells a quick-to-assemble, cheap and temporary housing solution for a single hen? Maybe detail on how to build one would make a good DIY project if no one is marketing a suitable product.

I was also very pleased to see your recent article on the Orloff (*Buying guide*, *PP*129). I have one in my mixed backyard flock. He/she has white flight feathers like the male example in your article, but was sold to me as female. The muffling is not yet well enough developed to make a distinction.

Are white flights characteristic of the males, and should I be calling him/her Paul instead of Polly?

Helen Carnson, Bury, Lancs.

I'm not aware of anyone producing a small, cost-effective and easy-to-assemble chicken coop intended for use as an isolation unit. A secondhand plastic Eglu might be a good option (very easy to keep clean) or, for the ultimate in affordability, a large and sturdy cardboard box that can simply be burnt after use. Really pleased that you enjoyed the Orloff buying guide. White flight feathers are a feature of the spangled male, so it sounds like you might have yourself a crower! Ed.

Red mite routed?

I read recently that red mite and spiders are cousins and, as conkers are supposed to deter spiders, I decided to try them against the dreaded mite. So I collected some fresh conkers and put them around the hen house and in the nest box. This is what I found.

Before using the conkers there were obvious patches of red mite under the nest boxes, which I remove each week to clean. I also found the pests on the stand-alone perches (there are 16 hens in the house).

However, after one week with the conkers in place there was a considerable difference in the size of patches under nest box, but they were in crevices on the perches. A week later they were still found under the nest boxes, but less so on the perches.

After a third week I found less under the nest boxes and on the perches and then, four weeks after I'd introduced the conkers, there was just a tiny patch under the nest boxes and hardly any on perches.

Could conkers be responsible for the reduction in red mite?

Terena Young, North Newton, Somerset

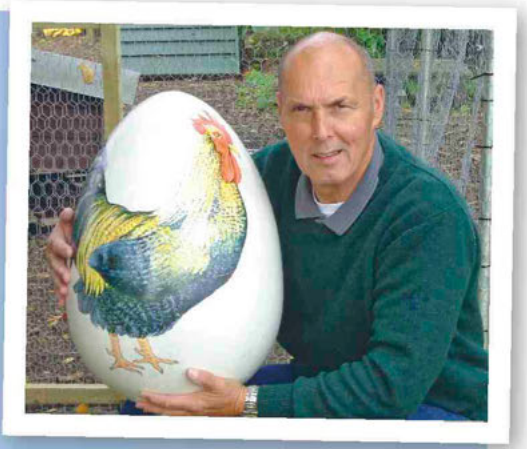
Mysterious giant egg!

As a keen chicken keeper, I recently purchased a large, painted plaster egg at an auction.

Now I'm hoping that, having included a photograph here, I'll be able to achieve the following:

1. Give your readers a laugh at the size of the egg (0.5m)
2. Reveal anything about its history or purpose
3. Discover the name of the artist who painted it

Steve Gunn, via email



Steve Gunn and his mysterious, painted egg. Do you know its purpose?

Sussex woes

I have a small flock of large Light Sussex which I've been improving over the last 25 years. Foolishly, though, I bought in a few hatching eggs three years ago and, since then, I've been plagued with lymphoid leukosis.

It's heart-breaking to see beautifully marked, large birds get to about six months old, then slowly start suffering with appetite loss, fading comb colour, whitish diarrhoea and reducing body weight, before they have to be culled.

Realising the mechanics of this disease (vertical transmission from shedder dams, then horizontal infection to other chicks in the group), no doubt starting afresh would be the answer.

However, clutching at straws, I have four, three-year-old hens and cocks of the same age, and am planning to give it one last shot. I intend to identify, hatch, rear and totally isolate each group of chicks from each individual hen.

My aim will then be to rear these birds up to the critical age, hoping to find possibly one or two hens which are clear from the disease, shown by the health of their progeny.

Also, I can't remember a major article being written in the magazine on this subject, although it could be interesting due to the large quantity of hatching eggs now being sold via the internet.

Malcolm Reeves, via email

Very sorry to hear about your disease issues, Malcolm; it's certainly a horrible way to see apparently healthy stock brought down. Perhaps readers have had similar experiences, and will get in touch with tales of hope. In the meantime, I will discuss the prospect of an article on this unpleasant disease with our resident poultry vet, David Parsons. Ed.

Easichick convert

I'll be interested to read Andy Marshall's review on Easichick bedding, that he mentioned in his diary recently (*Andy's diary*, *PP*130). I came across it recently and find that it does what it says on the package.

I'm using it in the shed on the earth floor as well as in the nesting boxes. The shed door is open during the day but, even with a strong wind, the bedding doesn't blow around.

If it gets wet, it quickly dries out and doesn't clump together. The girls mix it with the dry earth for dust bathing in, too. From a cleaning aspect, I pick out droppings each day, and give it a rake through every few days. Overall it's much easier to keep the hen house clean, and there's less odour, too.

I only have seven hens in my flock but, so far, I'm finding Easichick superb for my needs. What's more, as my local farm store can supply it at just over £5 per bag, I have no delivery costs to worry about, so I'm a convert.

Let's see how it goes through the winter, and how it turns out after Andy's more extensive trials.

Judith Rayner, via email

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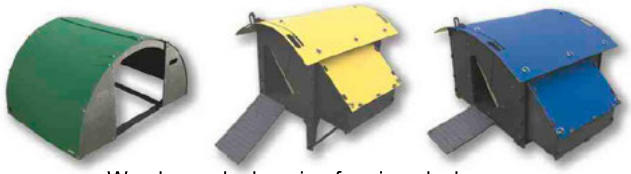

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Chirpy behaviour

Agricultural consultant and chicken enthusiast **Paul Donavan** reveals that chickens aren't as uncommunicative as many people think

As humans we take our speech for granted. Communication is a universal language representative to a specific animal species. For example, humans communicate through talking, dolphins use a series of clicks and, of course, birds employ a variety of songs.

When it comes to vocalisation, chickens actually have quite a sophisticated repertoire of 'songs' and, believe it or not, have communication skills on a par with those of some primates. Far from being the perceived 'stupid' bird, chickens are actually very intelligent; but then most of us have known that all along, haven't we?

Practical chat

Although the common perception is that chickens do little more than cluck – which they seem to do a lot of – this is actually just one 'song' among a vocabulary of about 30 at their disposal. What's more, each song is intended to communicate a different message.

> The reality of it is that hens can communicate a pretty impressive range of signals to each other.

The reality of it is that hens can communicate a pretty impressive range of signals to each other via the noises they make; everything from messages to reinforce the pecking order to those demonstrating degrees of inquisitiveness or contentment. There are also sounds used to emphasise territory, to signify mating and, of course, to warn others about the presence of predators.

Even during the process of egg laying, a specific vocalisation can be detected. Furthermore, the different varieties of chickens may actually have different voices, rather like people from different parts of the country can display a regional accent.

So, how do chickens talk? In humans, our speech is achieved through the combination of vibrations in our vocal cords – located in the larynx – the placement of the tongue in the mouth, and formation of the lips and the placement of our tongues and lips. In this way, the sounds produced by the vocal chords are transformed into recognisable words.

While birds also have a larynx, sound doesn't originate from it in the same way as

Chickens communicate much more with each other than many people give them credit for.

Chickens will often 'tell' their keeper if their feeder has run out of pellets.

it does for humans. This is partly due to the fact that they also have an organ in the throat called a syrinx. Sound is produced when air is forced across the medial tympaniform membranes situated in the syrinx, and the associated air sacs. As these vibrate, it produces the bird's distinctive sound.

A bird has control over the pitch of sound it produces, achieved by adjusting the tension on the tympaniform membranes. It can also control the volume by varying the strength of exhalation. In other words, as the bird has control over both aspects of its trachea independently, this enables it to produce several notes at the same time.

Early learning

As soon as it emerges from the egg, a chick will begin to mimic its parents. It learns how to find food, water, identify what's edible and what's not, and how to groom itself. During this learning stage, chicks certainly don't live in a silent world, but communicate using a variety of sounds. More of this later.

The songs birds sing are a form of communication, and are believed to have evolved through a process called 'sexual selection'. This concept was suggested by Charles Darwin in his book *The origin of species*, and is based on the notion that some individuals will out-reproduce others within a population because they have a better chance of attracting a mate.

The more vocal a male bird is, for example, the better chance it has of mating. Moreover, vocalisation may be an indication of fitness and health. Certainly, when it comes to cockerels, the more robust his dawn chorus, the better a specimen he is likely to be. Loud and powerful crowing is a sure-fire way of advertising his prowess to other males, particularly when it comes to territory demarcation and looking after his flock.

Although bird songs have evolved to be species-specific, they can be 'understood' by unrelated species. For example, in times of threat, such when there's a predator nearby, the alarm call a bird produces is understood by other, non-related species around it.

These calls may also be accompanied by specific types of movement towards that threat, such as rapid wing flapping. The idea is to warn other birds in the vicinity and even 'band together' to produce what is commonly known as 'mobbing calls'. These display quite distinctive patterns, and are often produced in short, rapid bursts, followed by a period of rest, then repeated again.

Just as with humans being able to identify individuals by their voice, so it's believed that that birds may also be able to recognise specific individuals through their calls, or the calls of their young.

> Although bird songs have evolved to be species-specific, they can be 'understood' by unrelated species.

This can be particularly useful when a bird, such as a hen, has a large number of chicks to look after. She not only needs to communicate with them, but must also be able to recognise their calls should they become separated from her. During these periods of separation, the female can become rather anxious. In addition, she can respond quite aggressively if the chick emits a particular call which she interprets as being a sign of danger or distress.

Social niceties

Chickens are social creatures and, within any group of them there will always be a well established and understood hierarchy, known as the 'pecking order'. One of the ways in which this is acted upon is by communication within the group.

Enter a chicken pen and the flock will often begin following you around, clucking contentedly as they go. Fill up their feeder, and another song is sung.

Left all day on their own, chickens will 'call' enthusiastically when they see someone approaching, as if to greet them. What's more, some research has shown that a chicken can recognise an individual person, and then respond to that individual even after several months of not seeing him or her.

The sounds made when hens find food vary depending on how excited they are about what they've found!

Chicken behaviour

When one bird finds food, it conveys to the others its findings. But interestingly, research has shown that chickens use several different calls depending on their level of food-related excitement (based on the type found). Their normal food may elicit an entirely different call to that of something you give them as a treat.

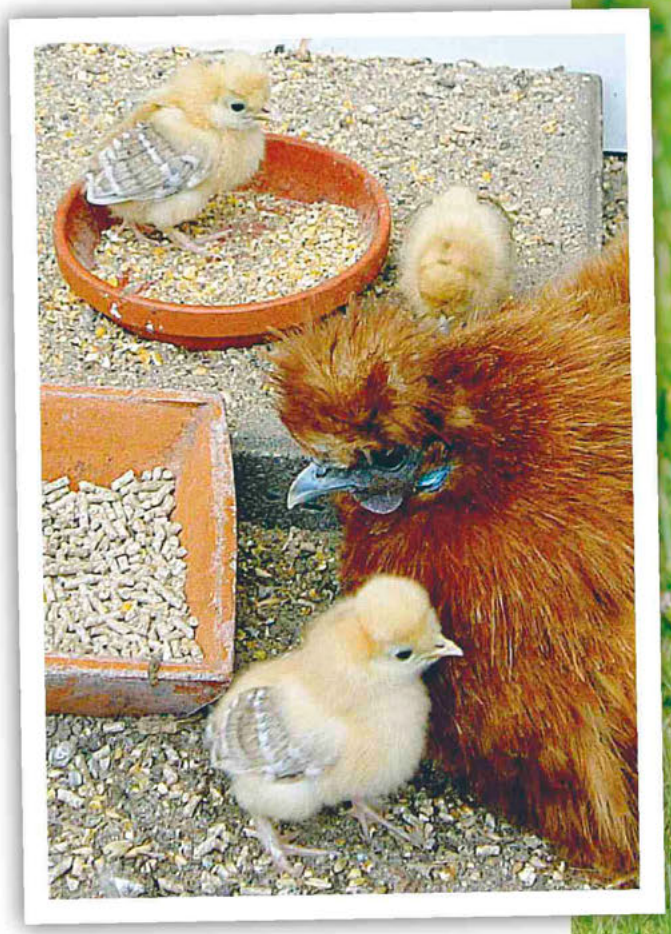
A chicken will also inform you if it's unhappy about something. If my chickens ever run out of food, and I'm not quick enough at re-filling their feeders, they become extremely vocal and kick-up an awful fuss!

If one chicken spots a cat approaching, it'll immediately produce a warning cry to alert other flock members of the potential danger. Interestingly, I've noticed with my hens, that the warning they give is different depending on the type of threat.

The presence of a snake, for example, will elicit an entirely different response than that of say a bird of prey flying overhead. This is accompanied by a different type of behavioural response as well.

If a snake is spotted, the birds stand proud and alert; presumably giving them the best

> Chickens use several different calls depending on their level of food-related excitement.



A broody hen will communicate with her young, and can recognise their individual cheeps.

A noisy cockerel is usually a productive cockerel!

> With chickens, communication begins even before the chick has hatched.

possible view of the ground and the potent aggressor, then an awful lot of 'chatter' begins.

If the snake is a small one, the birds will attack it. Generally with a large snake they know to give it a wide berth although, several years ago I watched six chickens physically attack a 1m-long African Rock python, and the snake came off worse. They were extremely vocal during the attack as well.

If the threat happens to be a bird of prey, the chickens tuck themselves tight into the ground to camouflage themselves, and remain silent until the perceived threat has passed. As soon as they feel safe, they begin communicating again as if asking one another: "Is everyone ok?"

Something I've also noticed with my birds is that the distress call they produce when there's a snake nearby is very similar to the one given off when they've run out of food.

First contact

With chickens, communication begins even before the chick has hatched. Inside the egg it will begin to pip and, in response, the mother hen will make a low 'purring' noise back. This is a bonding communication, so that when the chick hatches it'll recognise its mother and be able to find her should it become separated.

Even when several breeding hens are kept together and brood eggs at the same time, the resultant chicks all know their own mother, and will follow her around without any apparent confusion. You might imagine that, under those circumstances, the youngsters would simply latch on to any hen they can find, but that's not what happens at all.

Chicks that momentarily try and join with the wrong group are left in no doubt about the mistake they've made; the broody hen will unceremoniously see off the interloper. This shows that a hen can recognise her chicks through their calls. Even though to us they may all sound the same, there must be subtle differences that allow the mother-chick bond to develop.

Bird-to-bird communication also plays a role in teaching the young chicks what they can and can't eat, and there are different types of sounds for what is edible, and what's not.

As the chick instinctively pecks at food its mother is pecking at, she'll be telling it 'that's edible'. But if she notices it pecking at something which isn't suitable, she'll warn the youngster off with a different tone.

Interestingly, it's also been noted that, depending on how responsive the chick, its

Chicks learn from their broody mothers. Those hatched and kept in large-scale commercial set-ups aren't nearly as 'talkative'.

mother will modify what she's teaching it; rather like the way in which we teach children at school. The brighter ones are taught more complex tasks and, having the ability to learn and communicate, is what gives the individual bird its personality.

As a chick grows, it continues to learn from its mother, but also starts taking on board lessons from life, too. Daily experiences are confined to the bird's memory, and the decisions it makes later on in life will be influenced by the memory of these early events.

Life lessons

As each bird will face different experiences, these are conveyed to other birds through communication when that particular situation arises. It would be easy to say some of these decisions are based on 'instinct', when in fact somewhere along the line, they have actually had to be either taught, or learnt.

It's often said that the domestic chicken is an entirely different bird to its Jungle Fowl cousin, from which it originated, and that certain traits have been bred out as a result of domestication. But this isn't completely true in my view.

In a like-for-like situation, the way chickens communicate with each another, and how they teach their young, is just the same as it's always been.

The only instance when we can justifiably claim that they are different birds, is when we cram them into wire cages for intensive egg-laying, or rear thousands at a time in huge, industrial-style poultry houses.

Under these extreme conditions, not only is a lot of the birds' natural behaviour lost, but it is evident, if you have ever been into one of these environments and listened, that communication is what could best be described as being 'repetitive'. Without the ability to interact with different situations and experiences, there is little scope for progressive communication.

My garden hens

Trish Colton offers tales of eggs, midges and grubs as she reflects on more happy hours spent with her happy little flock.

Yay! The last time I wrote this blog, I moaned about not getting any eggs until next spring. Well, Nonami has proved me wrong. The little star stopped being broody, had a very light moult and went back into the egg-laying business, much to my surprise.

However, she didn't want us to get too excited, so she chose to lay her eggs in the most inaccessible part of the coop, rather than in the nest box. I can't reach them, so my 6'2" son has to lean in and get them for me!

I suspect that Prissy may have been influenced by her because, last week, I found an egg buried in the mud underneath the coop. Whereas Nonami is fastidious, and wouldn't dream of laying anywhere that didn't have nice, clean bedding, Prissy doesn't care. She'll squat wherever she happens to be at the time.

She often makes her way into the nest box but, if she's been busy chasing midges in the garden, it's a different matter. She'll bounce in and out of the coop like a yo-yo. So many midges, so little time! And if the egg makes its appearance on the lawn, so be it.

Mad Irene used to be the same but, in her case, it was because she didn't want to miss any goings on outside. With Prissy, it's simply that she's easily distracted. No more muddy eggs have made an appearance, and the only other ones to be seen have been Nonami's. So I'm guessing this was a one-off.

To be honest, when it comes to catching midges, Scrat is easily the champion. She dashes round like mad, jinking, weaving and twirling. I have no idea how many she actually manages to catch, but she certainly entertains us with her antics.

One of Pom-Pom's favourite occupations is sitting on my lap. While she's there she likes to eat, to preen or to sleep. What she doesn't like, though, is to share.

Quite often Fizz decides to join her; she tolerates his presence for a while but, if he stays too long, she pushes him off. He joined us recently and she was about to manoeuvre herself into a good bulldozing position when Prissy arrived too.

The only trouble was that, instead of landing on me, she landed on Pom-Pom. They sorted themselves out and madam made her way from my lap on to my arm, muttering and complaining as if it was all my fault. Gradually, they all settled down and had a group preening session, while I was more or less immobilised.

Although it can't really be claimed that Fizz is a perfect example of how a good cockerel (or even a normal one) should behave, he tries his best. For example, he'll often call the girls over to munch on a tasty snack he's found for them, even if it does turn out to be a long-dead leaf. These days, they usually ignore his calls.

Me being invaded by Pom-Pom, Fizz and Prissy!

But when he discovered something that really was edible, Rebecca wandered over to check it out. Fizz showed her a small, succulent grub, she decided it was to her taste and tried to eat it. No matter what she did, she couldn't manage to keep it in her beak long enough to swallow it; it just kept falling out.

Punk was intrigued by all this activity, so she sauntered over to see if she could help. She very kindly showed Rebecca how to pick the grub up, manipulate it to the back of the throat and swallow it. I'd swear she had a smirk on her face as she walked off!

Tu-Tu had a very long-lasting moult this year. Maybe it was because she also had a particularly heavy feather loss and was walking round for ages in just her underwear. I was beginning to get worried because she is a really old lady now but, in the end, she feathered-up and is back to her beautiful, Pekin self.

> "I have no idea how many she actually manages to catch, but she certainly entertains us with her antics.

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Crossing the line

Fred Hams investigates the prospects for producing good quality, home-grown table birds using tried and trusted methods.

Regular readers will know that I do my best with these features to cover the wide and diverse interests that make up small-scale poultry keeping. Welfare is always high on my list of priorities and, thankfully, judging by the responses I get, it is for most readers of this magazine, too.

Yet however well we keep our birds, there will always be the problem of spare cockerels. Those whose interest in keeping chickens consists solely of a handful of 'bought-in' laying hybrids kept for their home-produced eggs, will have to face the fact that for every one of these, probably brown, pullets there would have been a pretty, predominantly white, perfectly-formed baby brother killed at day-old.

Plenty of interest

The wide ranging interests of the *PP* readership seems to have been reflected by the number of enquiries I've been getting from utility-minded keepers; judging by the amount of feedback, there are far more of these reading the magazine at the moment than I would have thought.

Composite replies to many of these readers' questions (which I have already answered individually) will make up the bulk of next month's article. To this end, I would ask any reader who, thanks to my probably inadequately explanations of important points, still isn't clear, to not hesitate in getting in touch with me again.

Even those keeping fowl solely as pets or animated garden ornaments, will have to face

1. Egg production costs (and the related welfare impact) will vary greatly between breeds and strains. The white eggs here, laid by a strain producing over 300 eggs a year, will be the cheapest to produce but, in a domestic situation, will see many surplus young males being reared on and disposed of at a few weeks old. The very dark ones are from the Copper Black Marans. These birds will lay fewer than 140 eggs a year, are equally difficult to sex and produce a very large but poor quality carcass. The tinted eggs were laid by Rhode x Sussex hens that can produce over 240 a year and, thanks to sex-linkage, allow the option to eliminate males at day-old, or better see economic production of table males. (Pic: John Lydon)

2. A group of Hugo Wells' younger f2 Sussex/Brahma growers. All have a degree of leg feathering, some have yellow legs and most have inherited the Brahma-type combs. Earlier table selection would have been prejudiced against yellow legs, but many consumers prefer yellow-skinned fowl nowadays. (Pic: Hugo Wells)

3. One of Hugo's earlier-hatched f2 crosses, producing a traditional roasting fowl, seen here in comparison to a modern, small supermarket broiler (right). While broilers are incredible converters of feed as young fowl, there is evidence to show that well-bred strains of traditional fowl can both produce a better product and have the edge on efficiency as old growers.

4. This group of young, Rhode x Sussex males are being reared alongside their Rhode and Sussex cousins to test their continuing table properties. Given that grain prices have halved, this sort of cross could again become a viable proposition.

the fact that, somewhere along the line, this leads to an inevitable excess of males. These are often disposed of at animal sanctuaries and small zoos, where they are typically fed to their carnivourous inhabitants.

More serious could be the plight of the often 'fancy' and hobby-bred surplus males that are naively consigned to poultry markets; a percentage of these to be sold to a disparate section of poultry consumers with little concept of animal welfare.

In fact, however we keep our poultry, we are just about all involved in a process that in some way or other will see a percentage of male birds humanly disposed of. Even, and this is an extreme example, the well-meaning vegan family who thought that a free living family of OEG x Silkies would add to the 'completeness' of the experience.

Predictably – being vegans – the eggs weren't collected, then broody female began to sit and then the whole lot were taken by the local foxes who, as it happened, were certainly not vegans!

On a personal level, during several years in what would now be seen as small-scale poultry, I had to accept some aspects of commercial reality. Yet I never came close to being reconciled to the sight of thousands of day-old males being gassed. Commercial practice decreed that there was no financial gain in letting them grow on to fill part of the nation's diet. Nowadays, millions of these dead, male chicks find a market feeding exotic

"More serious could be the plight of the often 'fancy' and hobby-bred surplus males.

pets; something that's far removed from the way much of the nation used to supplement their diet.

Burn-out

Strict, commercial sense may suggest that lightweight laying hens will have a lower feed/maintenance ratio, and so make more money, even if this sees their tiny bodies burnt-out after a year. But this is in contrast to their similar but heavier (often first cross), counterparts whose brothers used to provide the majority of yesterday's poultry meat. This was at a time when any poultry meat – even that from an end-of-lay hen – was considered a luxury. But I still maintain that birds like this could grow on make a useful and probably delicious contribution to, at least, the domestic utility keeper's diet.

Times and attitudes have changed, of course. In those far-off days, chicken was indeed a luxury meat, and a million miles away from the intensively-produced broiler fowl that now makes up the greatest part of the chicken we consume today.

But when you analyse this current lack of quality, it's likely you'll find that it's the excessive width of breast meat (now regarded by many as the normal shape for table poultry), which is such a contributor to the dry, woodchip-like texture and almost total lack of flavour.

Yet at the same time, much of the rest of the carcass carries so much excessive yellow fat that, not only are they difficult to draw, but many cookery writers and nutritionists are now advising much of the skin is best discarded as a waste product.

It's this same lack of quality – and the perception that chicken is a cheap, throwaway product – that contributes to a large percentage of those broiler carcasses ending in up waste bins. Nearly all of these defects are genetic, as is the 'genetic obesity' that sees the chicks eat 24/7 from day-old.

It's this early feed consumption leading to 'early life' growth (when food-into-flesh conversion will be at its optimum), that sees this otherwise unsatisfactory meat, produced apparently so cheaply and economically. What's more, it's the same early growth and obesity rates that result in a high percentage of problems for the mainline broiler strains. Many have difficulty walking, and some are crippled before they are even 40 days old.

> Many have difficulty walking, and some are crippled before they are even 40 days old.

But, so popular is the end product that the economy of scale sees these exaggerated creatures kept in hundreds of thousands. It's in the production of this one product that we as consumers, wittingly or not, have a greater negative impact on both animal welfare and the environment, than for all the other fowl that either we keep or others keep on our behalf, put together.

But, with more awareness about battery house conditions, movements like the British Hen Welfare Trust have triggered an improvement (enhancement) in cage conditions that sees many of their occupants enjoy better conditions than some of their so-called 'free-range' counterparts.

Genetic flaws

If there are genetic flaws in the industrial broilers' make-up, what are the alternatives? Those who want a slower-growing fowl could look at those initially bred by the French who, over the years, spent a lot of time and money developing slower-growing, modestly-breasted strains that could be used as parents of similar table crosses.

These include a group of Barbary-fowl-derived Naked Neck crosses; one trait that seems to be linked to a moister and better flavoured, white meat content. These, of course, are qualities that they would seem to share with the ancient La Bresse fowl.

Apart from texture, flavour will vary from breed to breed and strain to strain, with personal preference playing an intriguingly similar role to that found in fine wine, and even local, real ales. On a personal level, a recent batch of very yellow-skinned, maize-fed, industrially-bred Naked Necks reminded me of the Rhode x Sussex male by-products of my youth, that were probably not that dissimilar to the Brown Sussex x Game-on-Light hens that had a 'top end' Smithfield market reputation c1900-40.

One failing with even these mostly French-inspired 'designer end products' is that, just like the very productive laying hybrids, while chicks are readily available, they are all terminal generations sired by very selectively-bred sires on very productive, recessive female lines. This recessive characteristic enables a final generation to express all or most of, in this case, the sire's table qualities.

Small-scale production, preferably

Ian Ryding's Ixworth x La Bresse which, just like a batch by one of my La Bresse on the heavy, Cherry Orchard Light Sussex, suggests that although of modest size, the breed could surpass the somewhat flawed Indian Game as a crossing where a smaller, plump carcass is required. (Pic: Ian Ryding)

Left: I'm amazed at the amount of feedback the utility content of these features generates, much of it from oversees. For example, Adam emailed from Australia to express his interest, and included this photograph of one of his white Leghorns. Exports from the UK now seem to be successfully underway, but this bird suggests that we should consider importing some of the more utility examples of their strains.

from home-bred lines, will be likely to be both far more humane – and have a lower environmental impact – than poultry production on an industrial scale. Sadly, those wishing to create either their own 'true breeding strains', or even pairs of breeds that could make use of shared or combined qualities to produce top-quality table fowl, will find their breeding options extremely limited.

Neglect and lack of utility demand has led to many breeds existing only as exhibition strains. Both lack of demand and now perhaps the occasional peak in demand for newly fashionable strains, results in breeders failing to follow sound breeding technique. What's more, problems of this sort are compounded by the lack of any, active utility organisation.

Yet my recent postbag, telephone conversations and emails suggest that interest in this aspect of poultry keeping is still alive and well. Most of the more recent enquiries have centred on aspects of quality table fowl production, with several questioners picking up on the added benefit of making use of various first crosses.

Some have even homed-in on my mention of the sound practice – even when using pure breeds – of differentiating between carefully selected, core breeders, and the bulk of the flock used as production fowls.

Sex-linked role

We could start by understanding the role of sex-linked crosses, such as the time-honoured use of Rhode (gold) males on Light Sussex (silver) hens that, at one time, produced a high proportion of the nation's gold pullets as layers, and silver table males. But that was all well and good when consumers had realistic expectations about breast meat content.

But the almost symbiotic relationship between the two breeds saw a noticeable drop in conformation, when Rhode males from strains developed to lay 360+ eggs were used on Sussex females developed to lay even 220 eggs. These may have served a meat-starved, post-war era well, but the idea that these birds produced huge, well-formed carcasses is a myth.

Even pre-war rearers were beginning to use Indian males, which made sex-linking almost redundant as both sexes ended up on the table. The fact that, in the search for a medium-sized, plump quality product, people started to look at other options, including the La Bresse, is mirrored in my recent correspondence.

Never forget, though, that these birds were initially developed to meet a demand for small, well-finished Petit Poussins, and remain a relatively small-framed fowl. On a personal note, while still new to the breed, I continue to be impressed by their capacity to both lay over 220 eggs and finish at a wide range of weights and ages. These qualities may see the breed come close to seeing a handful of them taking care of all my poultry requirements. Also, I feel it's likely that, in many cases, they could well replace Indian Game as productive crossing sires.

> Neglect and lack of utility demand has led to many breeds existing only as exhibition strains.

For example, when using Rhode males from a better laying strain on very good table-type females, there's the obvious risk of lowering the table qualities of the male offspring. With this in mind, while thanks to being a sex-linked cross they could, like the hybrid layer breeders, have eliminated the male chicks at day-old, the Cherry Orchard set-up ran most of this year's males on to test for any drop in table qualities.

There will, of course, be those who see any mention of cross-breeding as pure heresy. But don't forget that nearly all breeds evolved out of some sort of interrelationship between indigenous and Asiatic strains. It was a fascination in the evolution of the early Brahma strains and the first Light Sussex, that led young Hugo Wells to use one of my table-type Light Sussex on one of his very good, tall-type Light Brahmas.

> There will, of course, be those who see any mention of cross-breeding as pure heresy.

The resulting first generation was so promising that one can see why the early Sussex breeders used similar crosses, and young Hugo decided to back-cross the best males on to his original Brahmas. However, the loss of his pure Brahmas to a fox pushed him into a brother/sister mating.

Instead of the predicted results, both males and females had very even, pea combs and most features intermediate between both grandparents, but produced very big and extremely good, white-fleshed table fowl.

The fact that Hugo wants one of the best of the pure table Sussex suggests the way his research is now heading. Properly written-up, any results could be of interest to both poultry historians as well as all those with an interest in the way pure-bred fowl could still could contribute to domestic utility.

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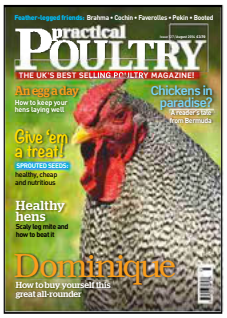

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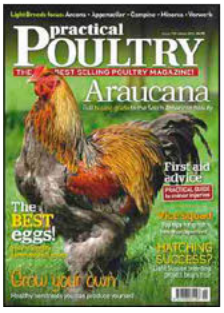

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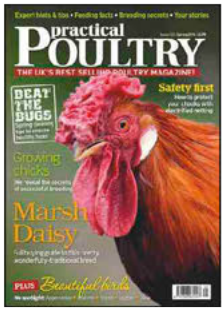

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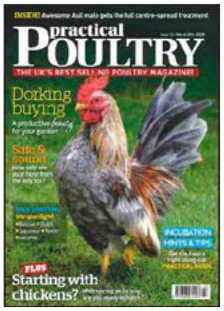

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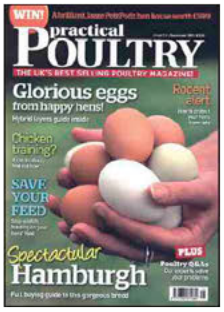

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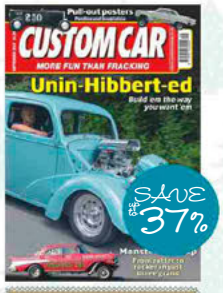

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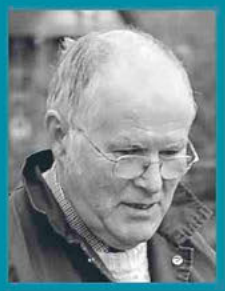


Healthy options

Expert advice on keeping your chickens fit and well

➜ **DAVID PARSONS**, MRCVS, qualified in 1975 and has spent most of his working life with poultry. He's currently a veterinary consultant, has written many professional papers and also lectures at Bristol University.

Biting beasties

Experienced poultry vet and university lecturer, **David Parsons**, turns his expert attention to the sort of external parasites that commonly affect chickens

You may have heard or read the terms 'ectoparasite' and 'endoparasite'. Ectoparasites are those creatures that live on the outside of the host, while endoparasites live inside the host. Last month, I discussed the tapeworm, which is a perfect example of an endoparasite living, as it does, in the gut

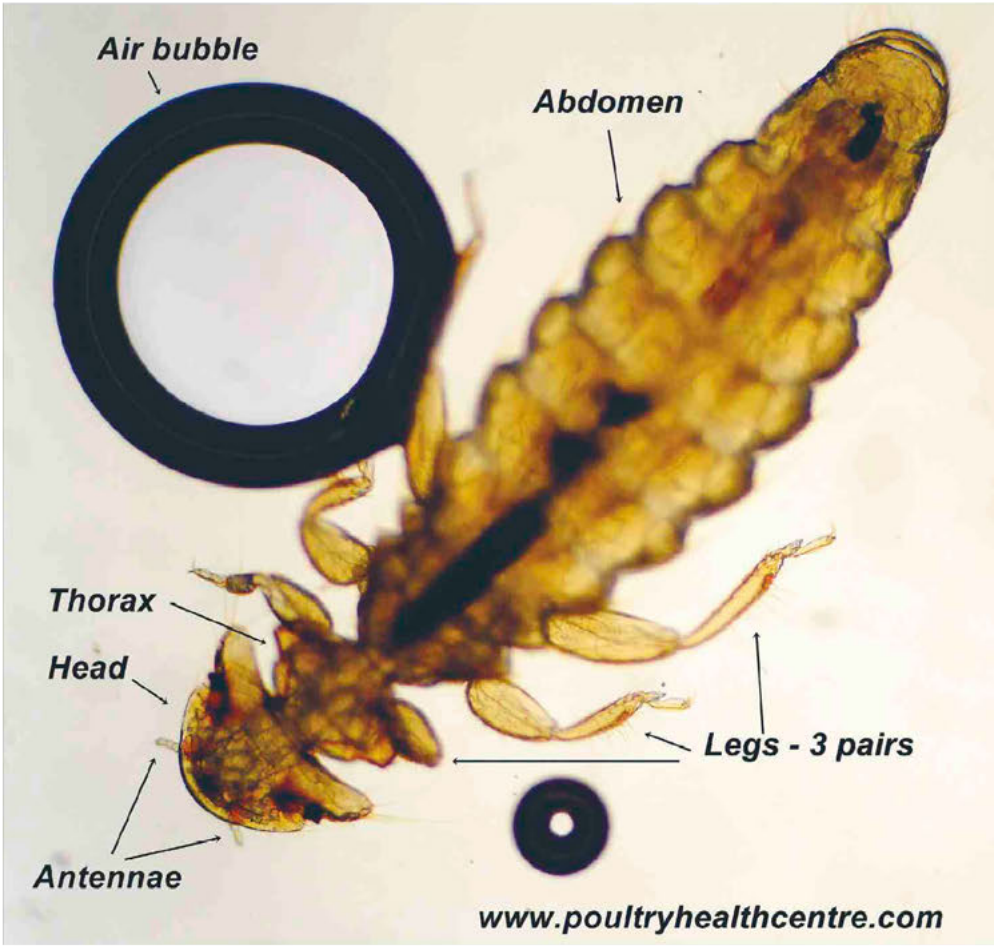
In contrast, the ectoparasites that affect chickens live on (or in) the skin or feathers, for all or part of their life. In roughly size order, and starting with the smallest, those you are likely to come across on your hens are mites, lice, fleas and ticks.

Mites and lice

Most commonly – at least in my experience – chicken keepers will see mites and lice. Considering that fleas are one of the commonest canine problems, you might think it strange that I've not seen many infections on chickens. Perhaps the answer is simply that most owners see fleas and ticks, know what they are, treat for them accordingly and don't bother with the expense of a vet.

In my case, though, it's not surprising that I don't see these parasites in commercial poultry. The way that chickens are managed in the commercial environment makes it difficult for these parasites to survive and spread.

Commercial flocks are usually reared on one farm, and then moved to another to lay. The birds are all the same age, the accommodation will be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between flocks, and access to other birds is restricted.

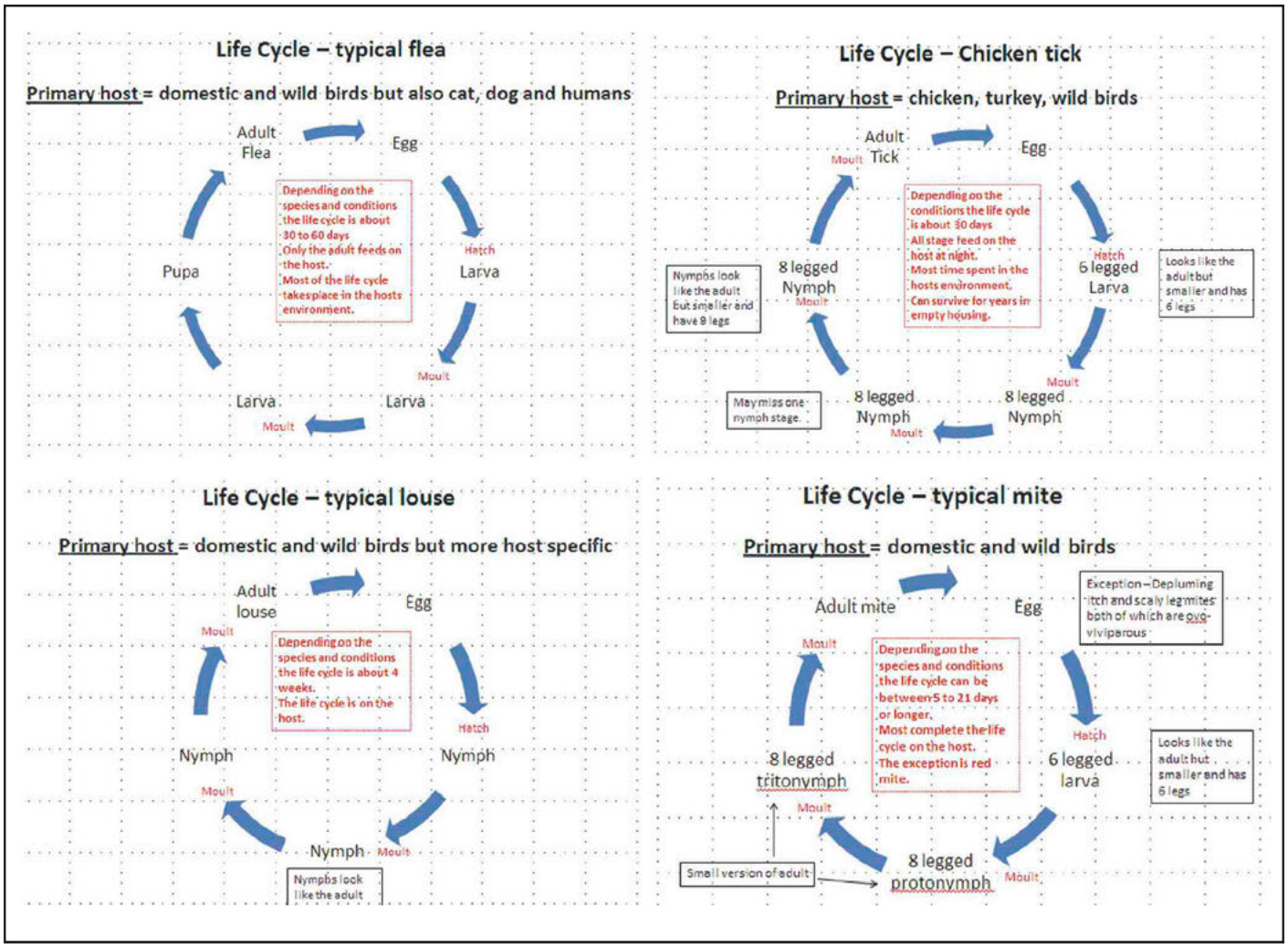


> In the case of mature adults, if you count six legs then you're looking at either lice or fleas.

However, in the typical, domestic situation, most chicken-keeping enthusiasts will more often than not have birds of different ages – from very young to years old – and all will usually spend a lot of time outside. Also, in lots of cases, hobby keepers can find it difficult to clean their chicken houses thoroughly and effectively, especially, if it's needed for roosting and there's nothing else available.

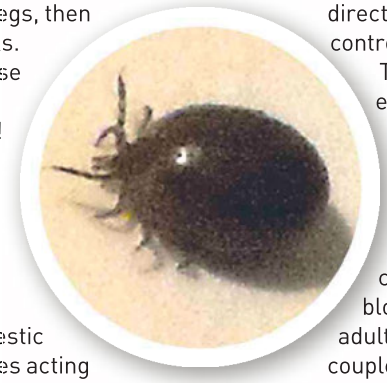
Another generality which is of interest and use in diagnosis, is the fact that some of these ectoparasites belong to the insect class of species, such as flies, wasps and daddy long legs. Others are arachnids (spiders). The difference being the number of pairs of legs they possess. Insects have three pairs of legs (so six in all), while arachnids have four pairs, giving them eight legs.

So if, upon inspecting your hens,



you discover creepy crawlies, the first thing to do is count the number of legs (you'll need a magnifier in most cases). Confusingly, though, this can vary with the age of the creature. In the case of mature adults, if you count six legs then you're looking at either lice or fleas. But if the pests have eight legs, then they are either mites or ticks. However, be careful, because the larval stages of mites and ticks have six legs also!

The photograph of the skin of the peafowl chick included here illustrates red mite and two species of lice, which brings me to another key point. It's important to note that domestic chickens can find themselves acting as host to more than one species of parasite at a time.



A tick like this will typically have a life cycle of about 30 days.

Cycle of life

A typical life cycles for the mite (eg Northern fowl mite or feather mite), lice (eg head or wing louse), flea (eg European chicken flea or Sticktight flea) and tick (eg fowl tick or pigeon tick) are illustrated in the diagrams provided; you'll notice that they all follow a similar pattern.

The adult female lays an egg which hatches and then progresses through two or three growth stages before developing into an adult. These are important details as number of stages, whether or not the creatures are on the chicken, and the shortest time for the life cycle to complete, can all have direct consequences on their control.

The European chicken flea, for example, has a life cycle with quite distinct developmental stages. The larva is maggot-like, and feeds on debris typically found in the hen house bedding, such as chicken droppings or the blood in the droppings from adult fleas. The larva grows in a couple of weeks, and then spins a cocoon within which it pupates and develops into an adult flea.

The flea remains in the cocoon over winter, emerging when the warmer weather arrives in the spring. The Sticktight flea is different only in as much as it localises on bare areas of skin around the eye, or on the wattle and comb.

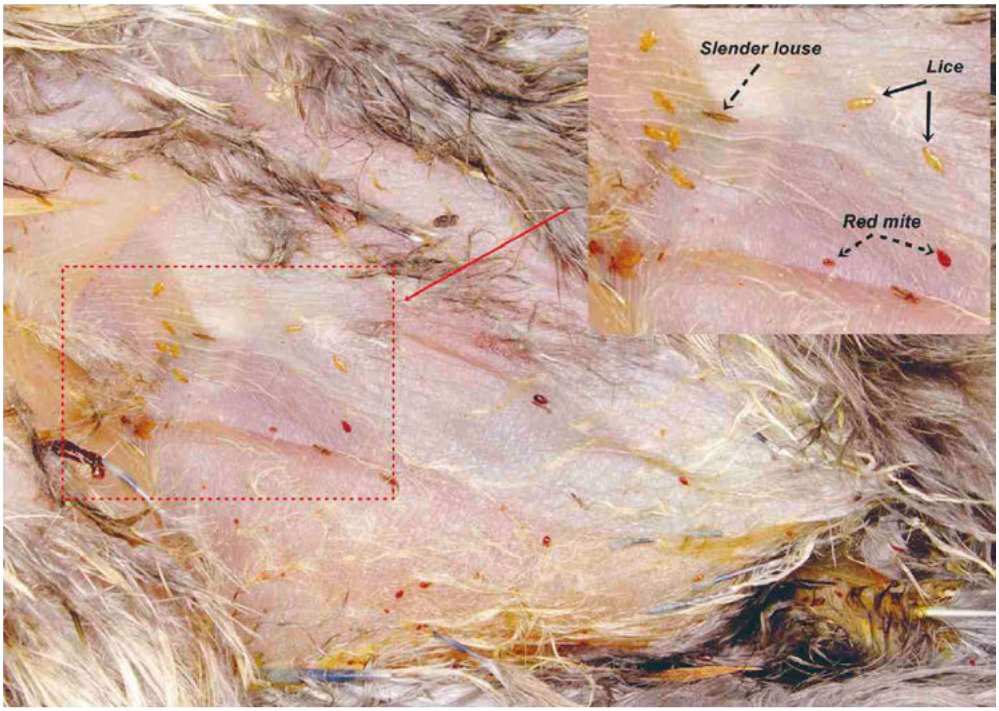
The female burrows into the skin, attaching herself securely using strong mouthparts. Mating takes place here, and the resultant eggs are laid about 10 days later. These will either drop to the floor or remain in situ and hatch. Those lava that hatch on the bird will quickly fall off and on to the floor to continue the rest of the life cycle which takes between 30 to 60 days to complete.

The developmental stages of lice are known as nymphs, and these look just like the adult versions except that they are smaller. Their life cycle can take as little as four weeks.

Important difference

Mites and ticks also have larva and nymph stages in their development. In both forms the youngsters look like pretty much like the adults, apart from the important difference that the larva only have six and the nymphs have eight.

> The flea remains in the cocoon over winter, emerging when the warmer weather arrives in the spring.



▲ Different types of ectoparasite on the breast of a peafowl.

Under ideal conditions, the mite's life cycle can be completed in as little as five days but, more usually, it'll take 21 days. For ticks it is typically about 30 days but, in the case of the pigeon tick, can be up to 11 years!

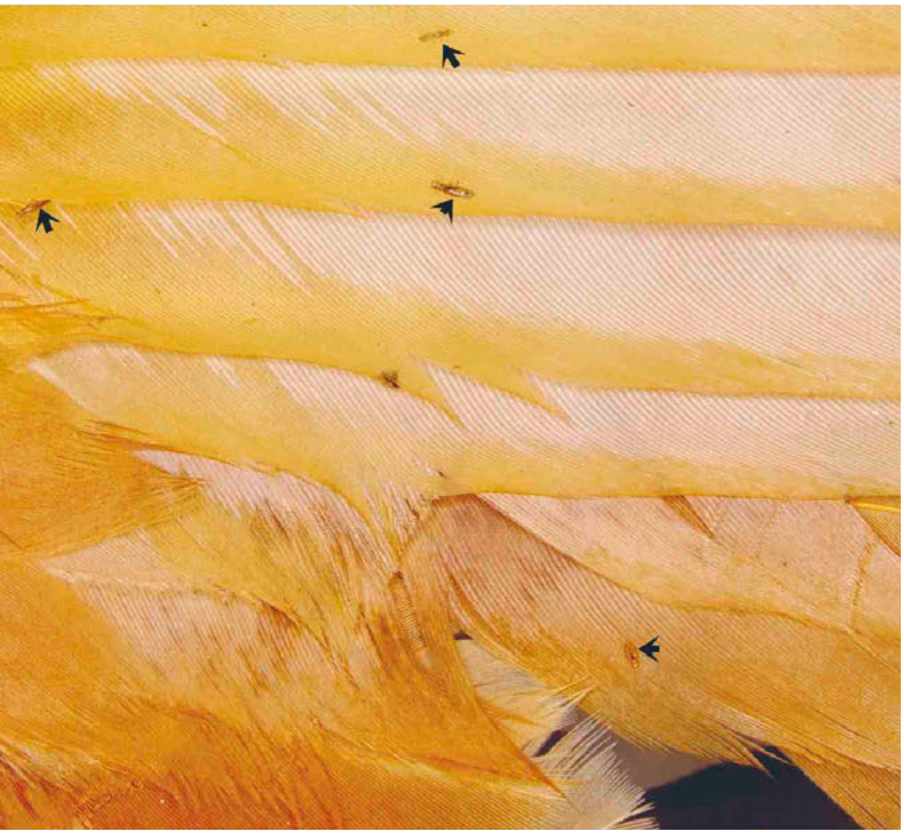
The adult lifespan of these species tends to be more difficult to determine. As a general rule, those parasites that spend most of their time off the host, seem to live longer. This is a useful survival adaptation because they have to wait for the next host to come to them.

As a guide, adult ticks can survive for years, cat fleas can live for between 50 to 100 days, adult lice for weeks and mites a few weeks. However, unfed adult red mites can survive for months.

The lifestyle habit of these creatures is very relevant to the effectiveness of any treatment given, and how it's applied. For instance, if all developmental stages take place on the chicken – as is the case for most mites (not the red mite) and lice – then the application of products to your birds can have an immediate and direct effect on the parasite.

However, if the parasites spend most of their time off the host, as is the case with fleas and ticks (which complete much of their life cycles in the chicken house or elsewhere in the wider environment), then additional treatment strategies have to be used.

This all sounds a bit complicated, I know, but it needn't be. Essentially, all you have to do is remove contaminated bedding and nesting material and thoroughly clean their housing with an effective product. Ideally, you should also leave the housing empty for several weeks, which means that alternative accommodation will be needed for your birds during that period.



◀ Lice on a bantam's wing.

Spreading trouble

The spread of these parasites is either caused by direct contact, or through contact with a contaminated environment, such as bedding and nest boxes.

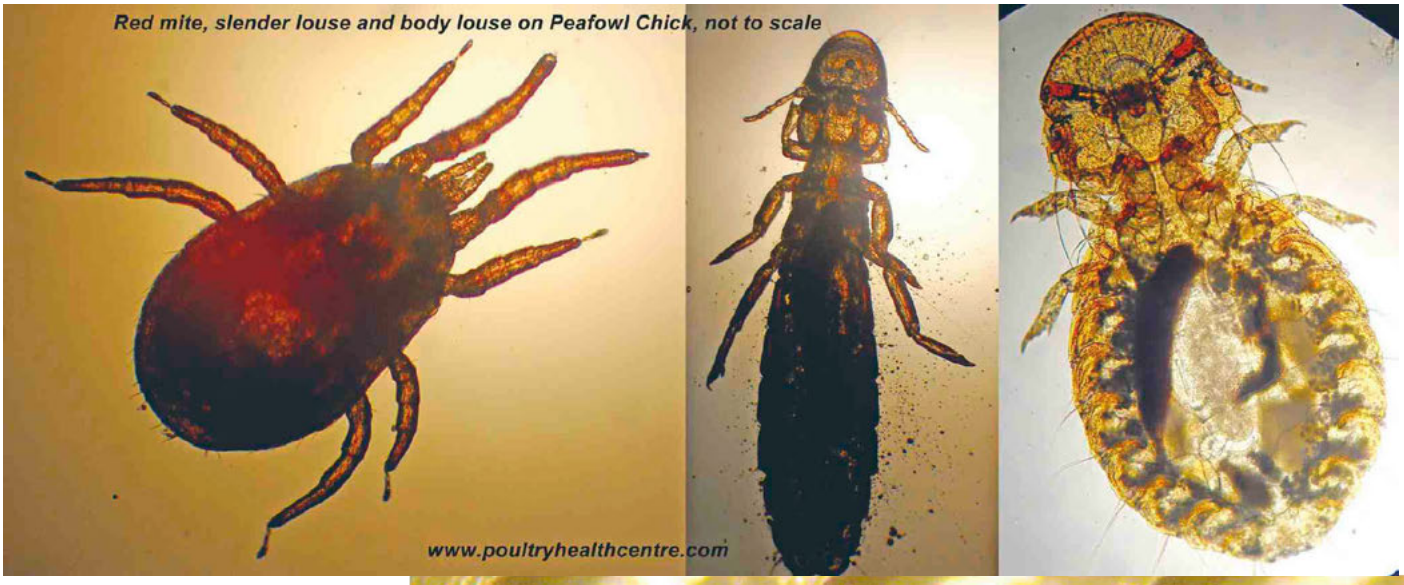
Heavy infestations in chicks will cause mortality, but low infestations may go unnoticed. Heavy infestations in adults could indicate other underlying problems.

Probably the simplest infestation to diagnose is that of lice. These creatures are relatively easy to see, even in low numbers. Ticks and fleas can be more difficult simply because they spend most of their time off the host. Ticks, like red mite, come out to feed at night.

Mites can be troublesome. The feather loss and general irritation caused may make you very suspicious. However, confirming the diagnosis may be more difficult, especially when dealing with quill mites. However, careful and thorough examination should provide a diagnosis in the majority of cases.

Treatments need to include both your birds and their housing environment. The likeliest source of re-infestation will be from the nest box and, as always, keeping on top of problems like this is something of a numbers game.

> Heavy infestations in chicks will cause mortality, but low infestations may go unnoticed.



▲ These three types of parasite were all found on one bird, at the same time.

Keep the level of challenge low by routinely removing old nest box material and cleaning out the droppings. Plan a time when you can conveniently clean out and disinfect the house each year. Also, always make sure that you use products at their correct strength, and allow good contact times to maximise their effectiveness.

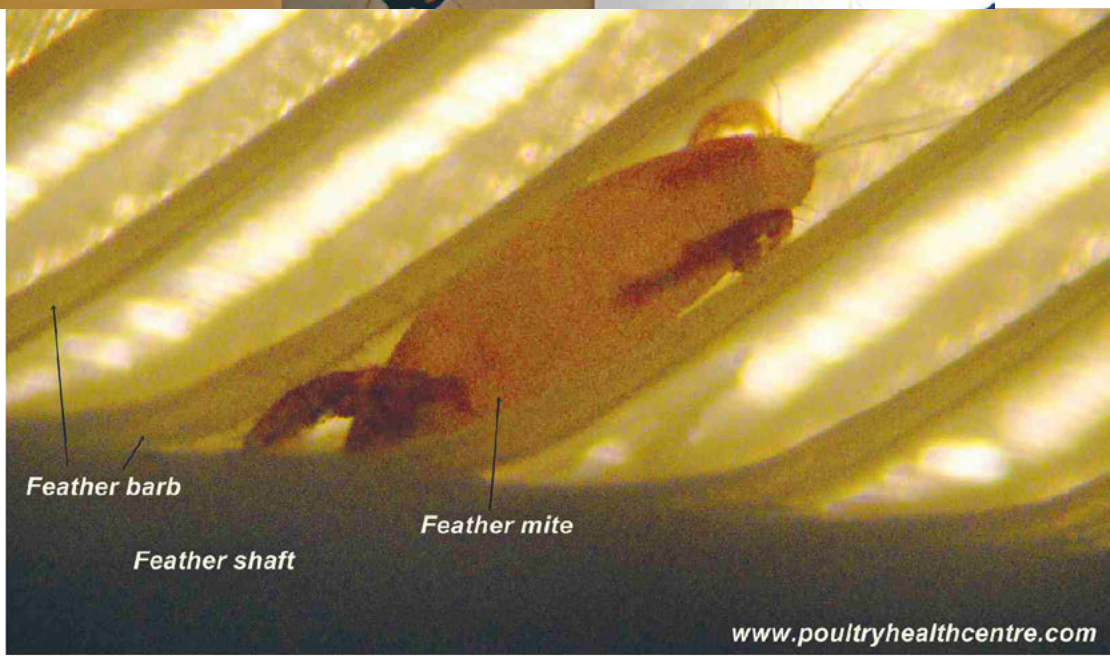
Treating your birds is a little trickier. Firstly, you'll need to examine them all regularly with a careful, hand-held examination. Do thing with all your birds if you just have a few, but pick a representative sample if you have a large flock.

Careful treatment

If infestations are found to be present, then treat properly and with care. However, only do this if you discover a problem; unnecessary treatments are, at best, a waste of money and, at worst, may promote resistance to that product.

Also, keep safety in mind at all times. Make sure that you comply with the egg or meat withdrawal requirements of the product being used. You – and particularly young children – do not want to be ingesting mite or lice treatments.

Another important requirement is that you make sure that the treatment intervals are appropriate. Most applications will not kill parasite eggs, so you'll have to wait until these hatch and then retreat. This could mean a treatment interval of anything up to 14 days.



▲ You can gauge the tiny size of feather mites by the degree of enlargement required to show one in this image.

My preferred approach to these sorts of issue is to use Ivermectin or Moxidectin. However, these are veterinary medicinal products with statutory 28 day withdrawal for meat, and seven days for eggs. Consequently, they are best used when the hens aren't laying.

Finally, always remember that fleas, ticks and mites are not that host specific. Other animals or people will do as a food source! Also, ticks, fleas and mites can carry and be sources of other virus, bacterial and worm infections.

So, keeping your birds healthy and the challenge from ectoparasites low, is good for them, your other pets and you!

Signs of trouble

Ticks	Inflammation at bite site, irritation, restlessness, anaemia, reduced egg production. Secondary bacterial infections.
Fleas	Inflammation at bite site, irritation, restlessness, scratching and allergic dermatitis. Secondary bacterial infections.
Lice	Heavy infestation known as Pediculosis. Avian lice are chewing lice. Chew feathers and skin, blood if from quill feathers. Feather damage, restlessness, failure to eat, scratching feather plucking, reduced egg production. Secondary bacterial infections

Poultry Health Centre

David Parsons is currently developing the Poultry Health Centre website; an online resource intended to provide a wealth of essential, health-related information on chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigeons, pheasants, partridge or avians in general. You can find out more by visiting: **www.poultryhealthcentre.com**

Poultry-friendly vets

This directory contains the contact details of vets recommended by *PP* readers, and practices specialising in poultry.

THE NORTH

Ark Veterinary Surgery
Mobberley, Cheshire
T: 01565 872 035

The Minster Veterinary Practice
York, Yorks.
T: 01904 620968
www.minstervets.co.uk

Robson & Prescott
Morpeth, Northumberland
T: 01670 512275

Sandhill Veterinary Services
Thirsk, N Yorks
T: 01845 578710
www.sandhillvet.demon.co.uk

CENTRAL ENGLAND

Amicus Veterinary Centre
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Arnold & Carlton Veterinary Centre Ltd
Nottingham
T: 0115 940 34000
www.merialvetsite.com/sites/arnoldandcarlton/home.html

Avonvale Veterinary Centre
Kenilworth, Warks.
T: 01926 854181

Beech House
Towcester, Northants.
T: 01327 354477

Bicester Vets
Bicester, Oxon
T: 01869 252077 (24 hour)
www.bicestervets.co.uk
contact@bicestervets.co.uk

Blue House Veterinary Centre
Biddulph, Staffs.
T: 01782 522100
www.bluehousevets.com

Companion Veterinary Clinic
Newark, Notts.
T: 01636 707636

Hillman Veterinary Centre Ltd
6 practices, W. Midlands
T: 01922 622280
www.hillmanvets.co.uk

The Jamieson Veterinary Group
Ilkeston, Derbys.
T: 01559 329322

The Minster Veterinary Practice
Sutton Bonington, Loughborough
T: 01159 516551
www.minstervets.co.uk

Radnor Courts Veterinary Practice
Cambridge
T: 01223 249331

EASTERN ENGLAND

Isle Veterinary Group
Ely, Cambs. T: 01353 658333
www.islevetgroup.co.uk

Mill House Veterinary Surgery & Hospital
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T: 01553 771457
www.millhousevets.co.uk

Stephen Lister
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T: 01953 455454

Retford Poultry Practice
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www.retfordpoultry.co.uk

Slate Hall Veterinary Practice
Willingham, Cambs.
T: 01954 262460

Westover Veterinary Centre
N Walsham, Norfolk
T: 01692 407040

THE SOUTH EAST

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Robin Creighton
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Coggeshall T: 01376 561667

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Hunter's Lodge Veterinary Practice
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www.minstervets.co.uk

Nine Lives Veterinary Centre
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www.ninelivesvets.co.uk

Pierson Stewart and Partners
Cranbrook, Kent
01580 713381

Putlands Veterinary Surgery
Paddock Wood, Kent
T: 01892 835456
post@putlandsvets.com

Seers Croft Veterinary Surgery
Faygate, Surrey
T: 01293 851122

Senlac Veterinary Centre
Battle, E. Sussex
T: 01424 777321

South Downs Veterinary Consultancy
Emsworth, W. Sussex
T: 01243 389911

Trinity Vet Centre
Maidstone, Kent
T: 01622 726730

Westpoint Veterinary Group
Warnham, West Sussex.
T: 01306 628086

White Horse Veterinary Surgery
Horsham, West Sussex
RH12 4HE T: 01403 252964

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www.ccbournemouth.co.uk

County Veterinary Clinic
Ilminster T: 01460 259509
www.countyvetclinic.co.uk

County Veterinary Clinic
Taunton T: 01823 326222
www.countyvetclinic.co.uk

Dalton's Game Consultancy
Amesbury, Wilts.
T: 01980 622350
www.gameconsultancy.co.uk

Filham Park Veterinary Clinic
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T: 01752 892700
www.filhamparkvets.co.uk

Ikin & Oxenham
Sidmouth, Devon
T: 01395 512611
Ottery St Mary, Devon
T: 01404 814322

JC Exotic Pet Consultancy
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www.jcexoticpetconsultancy.co.uk

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www.minstervets.co.uk

The Mount Veterinary Group
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T: 01404 841011
F: 01404 841014
M: 07850469595

Rosevean Veterinary Practice
Penzance, Cornwall
T. 01736 362215
info@roseveanvets.co.uk

Silva House Veterinary Group
Bath T: 01761 413341

St David's Poultry Team
Exmouth, Devon
T: 01392 872932

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T: 07920 522594
www.poultryhealthcentre.com

Upton Veterinary Centre
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T: 01202 624140

Wareham Veterinary Centre
Wareham, Dorset
T: 01929 552599

THE WEST

Ashcroft Veterinary Surgery
Cirencester, Glos.
T: 01285 653683

Border Veterinary Centre
Oswestry, Shrops.
T: 01691 670395

MacArthur Barstow & Gibbs
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T: 01905 773262
F: 01905 796179
www.mbgvet.co.uk

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IRELAND

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Tralee, Co. Kerry
T: 066 7123098

Peninsula Veterinary Clinic
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T: 028 4273 8700
Donaghadee, Co Down
T: 028 9188 2004

SCOTLAND

Academy Vet Centre
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T: 01776 703131
www.academyvets.co.uk

Girling & Fraser
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www.vetsinperth.com

Want to be included? **Send your details to:** The Editor, *Practical Poultry* Magazine, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent TN16 3AG, or email to: **pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk**

NEXT MONTH

practical POULTRY

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Buying guide: Frizzle
We spotlight one of the most unusual looking chicken breeds of all

All about combs
There are many different types to consider and welfare issues to be aware of. We reveal all!

→ Safe transport
Whether going to a show or the vet, find out how to minimise the stress of moving your chickens

→ Home improvements
Practical tips for sensible improvements to bargain-basement hen houses to make them better!

PLUS: Me and my birds, chicken Q&As, Healthy options, Breeders directory, News, views and comment!

** These are just some of the features planned for the next issue but circumstances outside our control may force last-minute changes. If this happens, we will substitute items of equal or greater interest.*

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Your Q&As

Got a problem with your hens? Need some practical advice?
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Email **pp.ed@kelsey.co.uk** or write to Poultry Q&A, Practical Poultry, Kelsey Media, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent TN16 3AG

Rescued hens can take anything up to two weeks before they start showing anything like normal behaviour in a new environment.

Shy rescued hens

I've recently rescued some ex-commercial laying hens and, although they're being kept in a nice garden shed with perches and nest boxes etc, they are very reluctant to come outside. They just huddle in the corner and don't move. They are feeding and drinking, but little else.

Can you tell me what's wrong with them and what I should do to put things right?
JH, Southampton

Commercial laying hens are normally relieved of their duties after about 18 months; the industry considers them to be past their best by the time they reach this age.

The important thing to remember for anyone rescuing these birds, is that they've spent their entire life in a carefully controlled environment with completely predictable light, heat, food and water supplies. They will never have experienced the great outdoors (or even seen daylight), so getting transferred to a new location and then being expected to behave normally immediately is asking too much.

Understandably they will feel vulnerable and afraid in the new environment, however nice their hen house is. Typically newly-rescued hens will be missing feathers, bruised and very stressed, so it's not surprising that all they want to do is stay inside, where it's sheltered and 'safe'.

You are doing the right thing by leaving them alone. If they're eating and drinking, that's a good sign and, once they settle into their house and start to relax a little, their natural curiosity will surface and they'll start to venture outside.

However, exactly how long this will take is impossible to guess; it'll depend on the individual birds, but we've known instances where it's taken up to two weeks for new birds to find their feet.

You could try tempting them out after a few days by scattering a small amount of feed just outside the pophole but, if they don't eat it, take it away before dusk or you'll run the risk of attracting rodents.

Once they settle in and are happy to be outside, you'll see them thrive. Feathers will grow back, headgear will redden-up and you may get a good supply of eggs. One of the nicest things about this type of hen is that they are extremely friendly and rapidly become very tame.

The supplier should have told you what type of feed they were on (usually this is mash) and you need to continue with this in the early days; adding yet another change to their lives is just not fair.

Gradually move them over to your preferred food after a few weeks by adding it in increasingly large ratios, until the transition is complete.

Sadly, sometimes the stress of this major upheaval is just too much, so just bear in mind that you may suffer some losses.

Sore feet

I have a problem with one of my Brahmas. Although she's walking and seems to be in good condition, her feet look red and sore.

I can't see any swelling and wondered if it was bumblefoot, which is what I've read about?
VS, via email

Looking at the photographs you've sent, this doesn't look like bumblefoot, although the feet do appear to be very red and inflamed. This could be the result of an infection elsewhere, having a knock-on effect on the bird's feet.

If you can't see anything obviously causing this secondary infection, you need to get a veterinary opinion. They may well prescribe antibiotics. In the meantime, make her comfortable and ensure that the bedding she's on is dry and clean. Applying a layer of protective cream, such as Sudocrem, might help soothe her feet, but this will get bedding stuck to it so you might want to temporarily replace the bedding with newspaper.

This doesn't look like a case of bumblefoot to us; the redness is more symptomatic of an infection elsewhere.

Are they healthy?

I want to buy some hens and a friend has suggested that I go to a local auction as they apparently have nice birds which aren't too expensive. However, I don't want male birds as they're noisy, but am after some hens that'll look nice in the garden and provide me with a decent supply of eggs.

Any advice about what to look to ensure I get healthy birds, and the type that'll best suit my requirements, would be a great help.
JT, Devizes, Wilts.

This is something we get asked regularly and the first general point to note is that there's usually a degree of risk attached to buying from sales and auctions.

While there are some reputable breeders who sell decent, surplus stock through these channels, there are others who either deal in birds – buying them at one sale and moving them straight on to another within a day or two, making a profit – or who knowingly sell old hens, described them as 'POL'. Another common trick is to sell male birds as 'unsexed'.

So, if you are inexperienced with regard to chickens, then getting your birds this way can be a bit of a minefield. Also, once you've bought the birds you really have very little comeback should there be a problem.

However, if you're determined to go down this route, then find someone with a bit of experience to go with you. Get to the sale room early, so you've got plenty of time to walk around making a note of the lots you're interested in. Also, if possible, speak to the breeder of your prospective purchases.

A healthy bird will be standing straight and alert in its pen, and should be displaying a full set of decent feathers, preferably with a good shine to them. Avoid birds that appear dull, listless and uninterested in their surroundings.

The head and comb should look fresh and clean and the eyes clear and bright. Check the legs and feet; the scales should be smooth and tight, and there should be no sign of spurs unless you're buying a bird described as a cockerel. Hens can grow spurs, but only when they get quite old, so be on your guard.

Don't, under any circumstances, buy anything that looks unfit, droopy, is flicking its head or making a 'snicking' sound. Also be sure to avoid any that are hunched, have their eyes half closed or are showing discharge from their nostrils.

Even if what you buy looks healthy, be sure to isolate it from any other birds you may already have for at least two weeks. This will give any underlying problems they may have to come to light, and will also protect your existing flock. Finally, while in isolation, dust the newcomers with a good anti-louse powder, and worm them for good measure, too.

Eggy question

I'm getting blood spots in my eggs. Is it safe to eat them?
JH, Leeds, W Yorks.

Blood spots are small clots of blood attached to the membrane surrounding the yolk, or anywhere within the albumen (white) of the egg.

Spots on the yolk are the result of a small haemorrhage in the hen's ovary before release, while those in the albumen are caused by a blood vessel in the oviduct rupturing.

As an egg ages, the blood spots become paler or even disappear (this is one way to tell how fresh an egg is). Eggs with blood spots are edible, although if you're selling them, your customers might not like them.

Generally, blood spots occur most common in eggs from pullets as they are coming into lay, but it's something that they usually grow out of.

Blood spots in eggs are unsightly and may put people off, but they don't make the egg inedible.

Poland in the wars

I've got a problems with my lovely white splash Poland hen, which I'm hoping you'll be able to help me with.

I bred her myself and love her dearly, but her crest is large and floppy and, consequently, now we're into the dodgy weather, she's falling victim to pecking on her head.

I've sprayed her head with purple wound spray and isolated her at night together with another bantam to keep her warm. I've also tried taping her crest up to keep her warm and also stop the cannibalism problem, but the little madam manages to scratch off any tape within one night.

Do you have any tips for applying protective measures or further solutions?
JH, Bradford, W. Yorks.

Polands are always susceptible to feather-pecking, especially around the crest. Running this breed with other, non-crested birds certainly isn't advisable. The non-crested hens will be attracted by the crest feathering, and pecking is almost guaranteed to be the disturbing result. What's more, once started, it's likely to cause serious injury and suffering and maybe even death for the victim.

There are many sprays on the market suitable for use as an anti-peck measure. Use one of these, and continue to tape her crest up – if it comes off just replace it as necessary.

Keep her completely isolated until she's fully-healed, and then think carefully about re-introducing her back into your mixed flock. The big danger, of course, is that the same thing will start happening again, causing unnecessary stress and suffering for your Poland.

Taping-up a Poland's head crest like this can reduce the likelihood of pecking problems from other birds.

Good to roast?

What breed would you suggest that I raise as a good meat bird?
I want to rear them myself to make sure I know how they have been cared for, so your advice would be much appreciated.
HM, Pitlochry, Scotland

You don't say whether you want a pure breed or one of the hybrid meat birds. The latter have been developed to grow very quickly, maturing in a matter of weeks. However, they can have problems with overeating and 'going off their legs' if they are finished too fast.

This type of bird will give you a carcass like those seen in supermarkets, with large breasts. If you're rearing them yourself, you can ration the food and attempt to grow them more slowly, although they'll still mature a good deal faster than one of the traditional breeds.

On the other hand, if you're after a slower-maturing, and arguably much tastier, bird, then any of the old-fashioned utility breeds, such as the Light Sussex or the Dorking, would be a good option.

If you decide on the pure breed approach, though, make sure you track down a proven utility strain, not one that's been bred for exhibition. There are also some very good, traditional crosses that can be made using the large-breasted Indian Game, but this is probably a project you'd have to undertake yourself.

Incidentally, Fred Hams is having a lot of success with La Bresse crosses; take a look at his article, which starts on page 52.

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phil.boy@virgin.net

Asian Hardfeather Club
Julia Keeling 01624 801825
shamolady@manx.net

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British Araucana Club
Amanda Rowe 01535 645083
araucanaclub@btinternet.com

British Waterfowl Association
Sue Schubert 01732 867987
www.waterfowl.org.uk

Brahma Club
Mrs S Black 01792 898310
brahmaclubgb@yahoo.co.uk

Call Duck Club
Rev D Reed 01209 217573

Cochin Club
Nina Morgan 01792 418579/
07814 203364
morgan.nina@ymail.com

Croad Langshan Club
Mrs L Heigl 01428 602992
lynheigl@lynheigel.demon.co.uk

Derbyshire Redcap Club
Mrs Woodroffe 01335 310305
thewoodroffesr@btinternet.com

Domestic Waterfowl Club
Mike Hatcher 01488 638014
hatcher579@btinternet.com

Dorking Club
Mrs V Roberts 01943 872660
victoriaroberts06@tiscali.co.uk

Dutch Bantam Club
Richard Pemble 07721 072423
www. dutchbantamclub.co.uk

Faverolles Society
Mrs K Hart 01454 317832

Frizzle Society
Alex Hales 07980 855544
ahales2010@live.com
www.thefrizzlesocietyofgreatbritain.co.uk

German Langshan
David Lawrence

01624 891128
lawste@manx.net

Goose Club
Denise Moss 01437 563309
contact@gooseclub.org.uk

Hamburgh Club
Mr P Harrison 01706 377653
christinehson@supanet.com

Indian Game Club
Mr & Mrs S Cook 01462 711617
john.sylv@indiangame.co.uk

Indian Runner Club
Mrs D Meatyard 01749 812758

Indian Runner Duck Association
Richard Saddler 01270 623775

Japanese Bantam Club
Terry & Emma Crook 01603 868373
emma140893@hotmail.com

Leghorn Club
Richard Grice 01833 660260
info@ukprimestock.com

Lincolnshire Buff Society
Mrs Helen McSherry
07527 628192 / 01630 638177
helen.mcsherry@btinternet.com
www.lincolnshirebuff.co.uk

Marans Club
Ken Nash 01827 872274
www.themaransclub.co.uk

Midlands OEG Club
Dave Hackett 01214 214610

Minorca Club
Rob Walker 07767 237840
robfirebird@googlemail.com

Modern Game Club
Dean McQue 01677 426345
hilltopgreen@tiscali.co.uk

New Hampshire Red Club
Mrs C Compton 01962 774476
christine@compton3.plus.com

Old English Game Bantam Club
Mr M Woolway 01792 894433
martcher-woolway@ntlworld.com

Orpington Club
Andrew Richardson 01995 601772
andrew.richardson@talktalk.net

Buff Orpington Club
Mr P Smedley 01904 468387
phil-boy@virgin.net

Pekin Bantam Club
Stefan Windle 07921 553931

Plymouth Rock Club
Sally Prescott 01472 840142
sally.prescott142@btinternet.com

Poland Club
Clare Beebe 07980 411174
clarebeebe@aol.com

Rare Poultry Society
Stuart Clark 01263 57784
secretaryrps@aol.com

Rhode Island Red Club
Mr R Everatt 01427 873001

Rosecomb Bantam Club
Mr A Knaggs 01944 768231

Scots Dumpy Club
Mrs Toddy Hamilton-Gould
01869 346554

Scots Grey Club
Rory Innes 01361 882965
07747 043817
roryinnes@hotmail.com

Scottish Ancona Club
Mr P Smedley 01904 468387

Scottish Game Club
Mr J Webster 01577 850318

Scottish Pekin Bantam Club
Mr S Currie 01292 541203

Scottish Plymouth Rock Club
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Scottish Rhode Island Red Club
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Scottish Rosecomb Club
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Scottish Sussex Club
Mrs R Aitken 01569 766775
agnes.aitken@virgin.net

Scottish Waterfowl Club
Mr S Simister 01387 372286
secretary@ scottishwater
fowlclub.co.uk

Scottish Wyandotte Club
Mrs R Aitken 01569 766775
agnes.aitken@virgin.net

Sebright Club
Brian Sinker 01691 770212
sebrightclub@aol.com

Serama Club of GB
Lucy Courtney 07861 042995
Lpbcourtney@gmail.com

Silkie Club
Louise Hidden 01457 855720/
07917 788855
louisehidden@yahoo.co.uk

Sussex Club
Mrs P Gage 01364 653182

Turkey Club UK
Janice Houghton-Wallace
01988 600763
janhwallace@aol.com

Utility Poultry Breeders Association
David Applegarth 01661 844961
davidapplegarth@directsave.net

Welsummer Club
Mr G Johnson 01952 460274

Wyandotte Club
Mr J Maddock 01229 772556

Black Wyandotte Club
Mr A Brooker 01344 774462

Laced Wyandotte Club
Collette Roberts 01691 780245

Partridge & Pencilled Wyandotte
Mr S Clifton 01773 821582
steveclifton189@hotmail.com

White Wyandotte Club
Mrs D Procter 01254 878319

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Dr S Johnson 02825 685727

County Antrim Agri. AsSociety
The Secretary 02825 652666

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Mr P Dick 01723 850690

Irish Society of Poultry Fanciers
Mrs B Downe 00 353 539135662

Northern Ireland Waterfowl Club
Mr a Irvine 07825 449260

Royal Ulster Agri. AsSociety
Mrs K Hughes 02890 665225

Ulster Poultry Federation
Joanne Harper 07852 990467

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Mr G Gilligan 01557 814462

Berwickshire Agricultural Association
Natalie Cormack 01289 386412

Carnwath Agricultural Society
Mr J Gardiner 01555 840867

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Pat Wilson 01334 828735

Dalmally Agricultural Society
Susan McLaughlin 01838 200638

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Mr B Stanley 01592 782197

Fife Agricultural Society
Louise Roger 01334 880518

Gattonside & District
Ornithological Society
Mr J Dalgliesh 01573 450672

Latheron Agricultural Society
Mr D Mackay 01593 721494

Leslie Ornithological Society
Mr W Paterson 01592 771690

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Lorna Miller 01343 540289

North of Scotland Poultry & Waterfowl Society
Mrs Cath Connor 01955 604458

Peebleshire Agricultural Society
Mrs H Dickson 01555 773211
peeblespoultryclub@tiscali.co.uk

Peebles & District Poultry &
Bantam Club
Mrs H Dickson 01555 773211
peeblespoultryclub@tiscali.co.uk

Royal Highland Agricultural Society
01313 356200

Scottish Border Bantam Club
Mr R Murray 01573 224210

Scottish National Show
Mr R MacDonald 01771 622557

South West Scotland Young Bird Society
Mr G Gilligan 01557 814462

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Bolton & District Poultry Club
Mr C Tomlinson 01254 831551

Cheshire Agricultural Society
Mr N Evans 01565 650200
info@cheshirecountyshow.org.uk

Cockermouth & District Fur
& Feather Society
Mr J Graham 01900 824575

Gt. Harwood Agricultural Society
Mr W Bruce 01254 672656

Holme & Dist. Poultry Fanciers Society
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Stalybridge Poultry Society
Mr G Bearley 01613 305234

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Wharfedale Agricultural Society
Mrs J Raw 01943 462541

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Craven Poultry Keepers Club
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Paul Littlewood 07989 012384

Driffield & District Fanciers
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barbara.middleton@lineone.net

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Mr J Hyde 01377 288030

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Mr D Agar 01947 895568

Gargrave Agricultural & Horticultural Society
Mr E Boothman 01535 652222

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Nidderdale Agricultural Society
Mr R Cornforth 01347 821617

Northern Poultry Society
Mr G Foster 01484 540042

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Mrs B Middleton 01913 889013
barbara.middleton@lineone.net

Northumberland Poultry Society
Mr M Straughan 01670 824309
mickstraughan@hotmail.com

Stanhope Agricultural Society
Mr K Gill 01388 766214

Towlaw & District Fanciers Society
Miss B Smith 01388 83276

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Aberdare Poultry Society
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Aberystwyth & Ceredigion County Show
Mr G James 01970 617481

Anglesey Agricultural Society
Mr A Hughes 01407 720072

Caerwys Agricultural Show
Mrs Thurland 01352 720043

Denbighshire & Flint Agric. Society
Miss E Turner 01352 712131

Dyfed Poultry Society
Mr A Davies 01437 721433

Gwynedd Poultry Club
Mr A Brown 01286 650775

Llanfoist Poultry & Game Group
Liz Sivewright 01873 852360

Lleyn & District Agri. Society
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E Douglas Esq 01341 422837

North Wales Agricultural Society
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Mr P Tucker 01792 850496

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Royal Welsh Agric. Association
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01982 554403

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Shropshire and Mid-Wales Waterfowl Society
Mr F Millward 01948 840011

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Mr S Clark 01263 577843

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Mr B Ward 01525 850758

Glossop & District Poultry Society
Tinson & Hidden 01457 855720

High Peak Poultry Club
Kate Mannion & Su Goodwin
07968 570033 highpeak.
poultryclub@gmail.com

Hinckley & District Poultry Club
Mrs J Timms 01455 290939

Lichfield & District Poultry Club
Mrs S Bruton 01092 843055

Malpas & Whitchurch Poultry Fanciers Society
Mrs B Birchall 01948 662856

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Nantwich Agricultural Society
Mrs S Broadhurst 01630 638630

Northampton & District Poultry Club
Mr J Messenger 01933 624293

Oswestry & District Poultry Society
Mr G Thurland 01352 720043

Selston Poultry Fanciers
Mrs N Hutchinson 01773 861921

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Mr D Hackett 01214 214610

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Mrs Julia Wakeham 01364 73219

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Carisbrooke & District Fanciers Society
Mr A Ingram 01983 760566

Chacewater & District Fanciers Society
Mrs J Daniel 01209 822482

Cornish Bantam Fanciers
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Cotswold Pheasant & Poultry Club
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Cullompton Fanciers Society
Mrs J Hobbs 01884 840895

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Mrs M Tite 01300 345176

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Mrs K Winson 01404 822293

Liskeard Agricultural Association
Mr B Wenmoth Watergate Cottage, St Dominic, Saltash, Cornwall PL126TB

Perran-ar-Worthal Poultry & Pigeon Society
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Poole Poultry Club
Mr S James 01209 832977

Royal Cornwall Agric. Association
Mr K Dowrick 01726 65166

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Julia Lindley 01722 790027

Stithians Agricultural Association
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Mr F Simmonds 01305 786403

Taw & Torridge Poultry Club
Mrs Sally Andrews 01237 421888

SOUTH EAST

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Mrs S Brown 01903 213674

Ashdown Forest Poultry Club
Mr J Crawt 01825 890499
john.crawt@hotmail.com

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Mrs S Baker 01787 282096

Hants & Berks Poultry Fanciers Society
Mrs K Roadnight 01962 771156

High Wycombe & Dist. Fanciers Society
Mr Richard Davies
01494 488388

High Wycombe Fanciers
Mr Richard Davies
01494 488388

Isle of Wight Poultry Club
Rob Whittington 01983 731406

Kent Poultry Club
Mrs Lorna Mew 01795 532848
kpc-sec@kentpoultryclub.org.uk

Portsmouth Fanciers
Miss J Stanley 01243 377120

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CHICKENS

AUSTRALORP HENS
£20 each. Black, L/F, hatched April 2014. Ceredigion. 01974 272587 (KH)

BANTAM POULTRY
From £5. Brahma bantams, Buff Colombian £16 a pair. Barbu d'Uccle, growers £5. Warwickshire. 07817 925268 (KH)

BLACK DUTCH BANTAMS
£90 the lot. 8 hens, 1 cock. Cheshire. 07535 104802 (KH)

COLUMBIAN PEKIN BANTAMS
£50. Two beautiful pure bred Columbian Pekin breeding trios. Hatched May 2014. Very good condition, healthy and wormed. Tame and friendly. Hens are near point of lay and cockerels are crowing and starting to tread them. Ready immediately for good homes only. Kent. 07787 134993 (BM)

DUTCH BANTAMS
£15 each. Trios or odd cocks, silver or pyle bred from Dutch & German imports. Or £40 for trio plus carriage. Suffolk. 07713 359386 (HP)

NANKIN BANTAMS
£10. 2 month old pullets. 5 month old pullets £15. Two 5 month old cockerels £10 each. All single comb, collection only. Cheshire. 01619 698832

NANKIN BANTAMS
£15 each. 5 month old pullets. 2 month old £10 each. All single comb 2x 5 month cockerels £8 each. Cheshire. 01619 698832 (PB)

NEW HAMPSHIRE RED BANTAM COCKERELS

£5 each. Hatched May 2014. Oxford. 01865 556745

POL LIGHT SUSSEX HENS
£12.50. 18 weeks old. Good quality birds. Fully vaccinated. We can supply as many hens as you require. Discounts for large orders (20 or more). Friendly and helpful advice please contact me with your enquiries. Shropshire. 01952 540876

POL LIGHT SUSSEX HENS
£15. I have POL Light Sussex for sale. 18 weeks old and fully vaccinated. Shropshire. 07511 265983

SERAMA AND KO SHAMO PAIRS
£40 per pair. Bred 2014, nice type. Various colours. Collection only. London. 07712 597400

TRIO BRAHMAS
£35. Pair buff sussex £20. This season's varied coloured, beautiful well groomed youngsters. Also possible pair wheaten Silkies £10. West Midlands. 01384 893154 (BM)

WELSUMMER X PAIR

£18. (One cockerel and hen). POL. Lovely, attractive pair of chickens. Good temperament. Good quality, healthy birds. Lincolnshire. 01522 752721 (HP)

WYANDOTTES
£15 each. Barred and Silver-laced for sale. Greater Manchester. 0161 3200769 or 0161 3660913

YELLOW PARTRIDGE DUTCH
£90 the lot. 8 hens, 1 cock. Cheshire. 07535 104802 (KH)

COCKERELS

4 GOLD PENCILLED BANTAM HAMBURGH COCKERELS
£Free. 11 weeks old. Good clean Birds. Free to a GOOD HOME. Essex. 07776 303332 (HP)

9 PURE BREED LIGHT SUSSEX HENS

18 months old coming back into full lay Feb next, high fertility, will split. Also unrelated cockerel 14 months old. 80% plus fertility, £10 or free if he goes with his ladies.Only for sale due to illness, a sad loss for me. North Yorkshire. 07591 394633

BANTAM COCKERELS
£FREE to good home. 2 Wyandotte cross cockerels and 1 Araucana. Hatched May 2014. Friendly, well handled birds. Staffordshire. 07824 316062

BLACK LEGHORN AND WHITE LEGHORN COCKERELS
£5 each. May 2014. Utility strain cockerels. Derbyshire. 01246 852306 / 07855 493358 (HP)

COCKERELS
£FREE. Two cross-bred cockerels. 5 months old. Free to a good home. As a pair. Cumbria. 01228 549883

LAVENDER PEKIN BANTAMS

£1 per cock. £12 per hen, trio for £20. 14 weeks approx. Just getting adult feathers. Collection only. West Midlands. 024 7667 2015

TWO VORWERK COCKERELS
£5 each. Hatched 5th June 2014. Derbyshire. 07919 835840

WHITE SIZZLE/FRIZZLE SILKIE COCKERELS

£5 each. £5 each. 1 smooth feathered white Sizzle bantam cockerel and 3 white Frizzle Silkie bantam cockerels. Hatched May 2014. Organically reared and completely free range. Excellent, healthy birds, used to children, cats & dog. Hampshire. 07880 713126 (MC)

WATERFOWL

9 INDIAN RUNNER DUCKS
Flock of Indian Runner Ducks (9) to go to a good home. Comes with ark which they have used to live in. Must be kept together and collected. All ducks have been reared from chick and are approx 12 months old. Pictures can be sent by email. Mix of drake and female. Buckinghamshire. 07834 699410

DUCKLINGS
£7.50. Khaki Campbell and Aylesbury ducklings for sale from day old at £7.50 to p.o.l at £20, also hatching eggs at £10 per dozen. North Yorkshire. 07975 697631 (BM)

MUSCOVY DUCKS
£15 each. Drakes £10. All colours. Six months old. Lincolnshire. 01507 327733 or 07984 389463

UTILITY AYLESBURY DUCKLINGS
£5. I have utility ducklings for sale. Day old through to 10 weeks old. All sexed male and female available. Please contact me for more information. Shropshire. 07511 265983

QUAIL

CHINESE PAINTED QUAIL
£20 for all. 3 adults plus 6 young, 9 in total. Pembrokeshire. 01646 651892 (BM)

COTURNIX AND TEXAS A&M QUAILS
£12.00 per trio. £8.00 per pair. All 2014 hatched and ready now. South Yorkshire. 07756 534079

JAPANESE QUAIL
£3 each. Various colours. This year's birds. Quail de Anvil bantams, £5 each. RCOM Suro incubator, £100. Selling up. Nottingham. 01909 477496

MOUNTAIN QUAIL
£140 for all. Three adult Mountain Quail for sale, due to old age dropping in on me, collection only please. Cleveland. 01642 824409

RUNNER DUCKS
£25. Lovely runner ducks - April 2014 hatch, so some have just started laying. Mainly apricot and apricot trout. Although, a few other colours still available. Mainly female but a few male also. Surrey. 01293 876020

OTHER LIVESTOCK

BLUE-EARED PHEASANT
£40. Cock bird. 2013. Beautiful bird. Unfortunately lost hen to fox. Lincolnshire. 01522 681720 / 07958 070286

HORSFIELD'S TORTOISES
£90 each. Or two for £150. Eighteen months old with excellent shell formation - eight specimens available in total.Care sheet available. South West Of England. 07837 795008 (HP)

INDIAN BLUE PEACOCK

£50. 14 months old. Warwick. 01926 842635 (HP)

MICRO PIGLETS
£100 each. Or two £180. £50 non returnable deposit. CPH number needed to keep pig which is free and easy to obtain from Defra. Mum and Dad can be seen, All colours available. Boars and gilts. Lancs. 07751 558960

LADY AMHERST PURE COCKS & HENS
£25 each. Cheshire Area. 01270 560899 (HP)

PAIR OF BLACK SHOULDER PEACOCKS
£150 pair. 14 months old. Warwick. 01926 842635 (HP)

ROUL ROUL PARTRIDGE
£125. Immaculate young pair very tame, unrelated. Herts. 07946 624894 (BM)

HOUSING AND RUNS

CHICKEN HOUSE - GREEN FROG
£170. It is a Green Frog, medium size, blue black and has only been in use a few months, it's virtually as new, and it has both water and pellet feeders which are included in the price. They house alone costs £340 new. An ideal Xmas present. Buyer collects. Lincoln. 01522 754160

POULTRY HOUSE
£95. Wooden poultry house. Apex roof. 10ft long x 6ft wide. Wooden floor. 6ft high sectional. Minor repairs needed. Berkshire. 0118 973 3764

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LF FEMALE FAVORELLES
Wanted. Show quality to join my existing flock. 07989 350295

RHODE ISLAND RED BANTAMS
Wanted. Quartet or trio wanted, must be pure bred. Essex. 01255 812328

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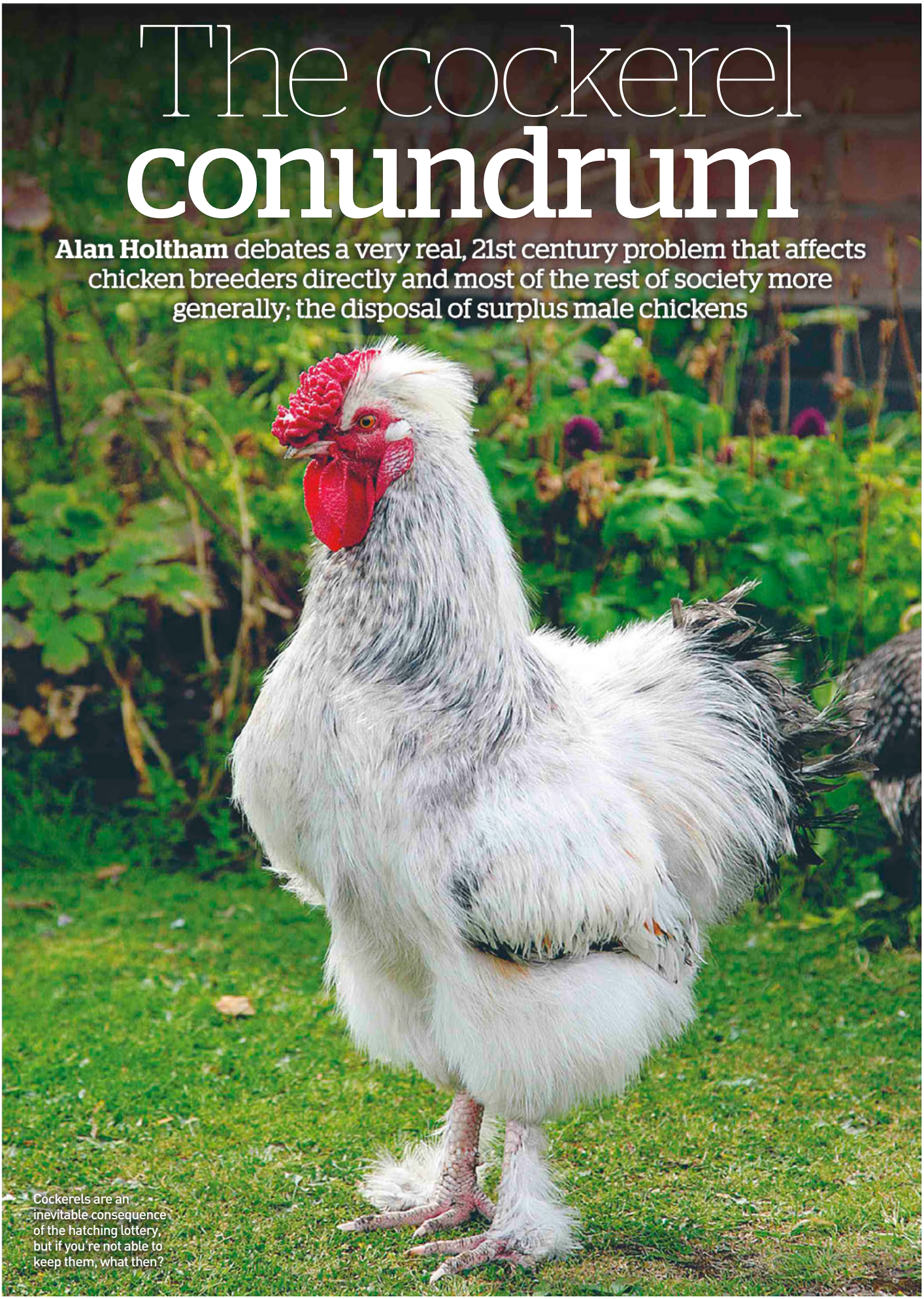
The cockerel conundrum

Alan Holtham debates a very real, 21st century problem that affects chicken breeders directly and most of the rest of society more generally; the disposal of surplus male chickens



Cockerels are an inevitable consequence of the hatching lottery, but if you're not able to keep them, what then?

If you've been tempted into breeding your own chickens then you'll already be aware of the problem. The laws of chance suggest that at least 50% of chicks hatched will be male and, while sometimes you might be lucky and get less, you can get more, too. I recently hatched a batch of six eggs, and every chick was a male!

Now, while there are few sights as appealing as a brooder full of young chicks, hatching chickens has its serious side. As a responsible keeper you must be prepared to deal with the inevitable and unwanted male birds produced and, for inexperienced keepers, that can be a problem that gets overlooked.

You may be equipped to hatch plenty of chicks, but are you prepared for dealing with the surplus male birds that are bound to be produced?

Reality check

The reality, of course, is that anybody contemplating hatching chicks should be prepared to take full responsibility for all the consequences of what they're doing. In the real world, though, things don't work quite like that.

There must be so many unwanted cockerels around, judging by the number of 'Free to a good home'-type adverts I see in magazines, papers and on forums. Obviously, these owners are desperate to save their birds from an untimely end.

It's all too easy to get carried away with the fun and excitement of producing cute, fluffy chicks, forgetting that a good proportion of them will turn into noisy, bad-tempered nuisances that'll annoy the hell out of you and your neighbours!

But if you're determined to press ahead with your hatching plans, then what are the options for those inevitable male spares? Sadly, none of the possibilities are particularly auspicious, but the welfare of the birds should always be your number one priority.

I used to try to sell my unwanted cockerels at the local auction, rather naively thinking that this would get them to good homes. In practice, those that did sell they rarely topped 50p (less than the selling cost), and I now know that most of them went to the restaurant trade.

I've also heard disturbing suggestions that this route supplies birds for dog bait, ferret food or as 'practice birds' for Game fighting. Added to this is the prospect that, once sold, the sorry individuals will probably be caged up and passed around for days with little food and water, before finally being killed in a far less humane way than one would like.

Regrettably, nowadays, it's my impression that too many hobby breeders seem prepared to hand over surplus birds without caring about what's going to happen to them. As far as I'm concerned, though, 'out of sight, out of mind' just isn't an acceptable maxim in this situation.

> Too many hobby breeders seem prepared to hand over surplus birds without caring.

I've also learned that there's now a definite 'dumping season', which occurs in September and October, when large numbers of spring-hatched male chickens are simply abandoned into the wild to fend for themselves by irresponsible owners. Another increasingly popular option, as I know from personal experience, is to bag-up spare birds and simply lob them over the fence and into the garden of another keeper or breeder.

Too stressful

You may be lucky and find a breeder who will take back any cockerels you hatch, but these are few and far between nowadays. Also, never forget the stress and trauma caused to the birds by being shipped around. So, the bottom line really is that responsible keepers should be prepared to do the culling themselves; you just have to harden your heart and get on with it.

I quite understand that many people find it difficult to kill an unwanted bird, and although I've now been culling them for several years and it does get easier with every one you do, I still feel pangs of guilt for taking another young bird's life.

But I justify this action to myself on grounds of welfare. All my birds are reared under ideal conditions, with diligent regard to the RSPCA-recognised five freedoms. They've already had more of a good life than 90% of commercial chickens, and they certainly haven't had the distressing trauma of industrial-scale production, transport and slaughter.

They've also never been exposed to the stressful rigours of an auction sale or whatever unsavoury end may follow that. When their time comes, I gather them up at night when they're quietly roosting; there is no fuss, no stress and I make sure that the end is swift and respectful.

The other important point is that you may also need to be able to dispatch a bird if it becomes ill or wounded, so it's an essential skill to learn. The earlier in their life you can do it the better, as you'll minimise the risk of getting attached to them. Also, older birds will eat quite voraciously, which is a waste of feed.

The difficulty, particularly for the inexperienced, is often that you can't tell the sex of the bird until it's several months old, and actually starts crowing. I always tend to err on the side of caution 'just in case', but my hunch is nearly always correct and, looking back, I could certainly have saved a lot of feed if I'd acted sooner.

The situation is different with auto-sexing breeds, of course, where (due to down colour or patterning) the sexual difference is obvious straight out of the shell. Personally though, I find it more bearable to dispatch older birds rather than young chicks; at least they've had a chance to realise some of their potential.

Terrible losses

Of course, all this skirts around the moral issues. For those people who get indignant about hobby-scale hatching in the first place, I quietly point out the millions and millions of male birds killed as very young chicks in a commercial hatchery.

If you eat shop-bought eggs you're part of the culling process, whether you like it or not. Gone are the days of dual-purpose utility birds, where females were bred for egg laying and the males fattened up for the table. Today's modern, egg-laying hybrids are laying machines, and the male produced have no commercial value so are disposed of in staggering numbers as day-old chicks.

> Obviously, these owners are desperate to save their birds from an untimely end.

What's more, for every pullet you buy as a point-of-lay bird, there will have been at least one cockerel to match so, somewhere down the chain, it's inevitable that birds will have to die as part of the process.

If you're not a particularly caring person, then breeding and culling will be no problem to you. But if, like me, you have some feelings for the sanctity of life and you are hatching eggs 'just for fun', then the morality may need some justification.

I know lots of people don't give it a thought, and I have to be careful not to appear hypocritical. But, at the moment, I've become reasonably comfortable culling males raised in my own hybrid breeding activities. My birds are bred as a sustainable food source, in the form of eggs. I need to hatch them for this reason, and cockerels are an unfortunate and unavoidable by-product.

I'm even more comfortable with the idea of selective breeding, and the associated culling that's done with a utility aim in mind (particularly when the male birds can go back into the food chain). I'm currently working on improving the egg size with my Light Sussex, and be able to eat any culled birds justifies their end to some extent.

However, I'm perhaps less comfortable with breeding and culling purely for show purposes. The reality is that breeders producing top quality show birds are very selective, culling both male and female birds that don't make the grade.

How to cull?

The crux of the matter, of course, is the actual culling, and here it would be as well to refer you to the official guidelines produced by the Humane Slaughter Association.

To optimise welfare, the aim of the slaughter method should be to render the bird immediately unconscious, without fear or pain, and then to quickly induce death before the recovery of consciousness. For this you need to be confident, quick and decisive, so get an experienced breeder to show you how to do it properly and responsibly before you start.

Our understanding of the physiological response of birds to stress has increased dramatically in recent years, and the legislation is continually changing to take account of this. However, unless you're working on a very small scale, in future it may become more difficult to cull birds without having to upgrade to more welfare-friendly (and expensive) practices.

Apparently, Defra is proposing to change the rules with regard even to private, domestic slaughter, as many traditional methods of killing are now regarded as unacceptable. Currently, killing your own birds, on your own premises, for private consumption is free of any legislation or licensing requirements. Check out **www.gov.uk/farm-animal-welfare-at-slaughter** for the latest guidance.

The various methods of killing are detailed in the HSA publication *Practical Slaughter of Poultry* which, although not a particularly pleasant read, does outline the current methods and legislation, depending on the size of your set-up and the intended use of the slaughtered birds.

But whatever method and equipment is chosen, the user should ensure they have the appropriate skills and training. Different rules apply in different situations, so my advice is to make sure that you're up to speed with both theory and practice, before attempting anything for real.

> For every pullet you buy as a point-of-lay bird, there will have been at least one cockerel to match.

The Humane Slaughter Association

The HSA is an independent, UK-based charity that promotes the humane treatment of all food animals. It constantly monitors the latest research and updates its guidelines to reflect current welfare standards, both for the animals and producers involved.

You can find out more by contacting the HSA at: The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathamstead, Herts. AL4 8AN, by telephone on 01582 831919, via email to: info@hsa.org.uk or by visiting the website at: www.hsa.org.uk.

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Ken or Claire 07808 661873, Preston, Lancs. LF: Brahma, Orpington, Appenzeller Spitzhauben, RIR, Welsummer, Cream Legbar, Tolbunt Poland, Marans, Silkie. Bantam: Wyandotte, Barnevelder, Poland, Pekin, Araucana, Thuringian, Light Sussex, Ancona, Orpington. 11 laying hybrid varieties. Ducks: Runner, Call, Miniature Silver Appleyard, Khaki Campbell, Aylesbury. Wildfowl: Mandarin, Ring Teal, Chiloe Widgeon. Golden Pheasants, Geese & Turkeys
www.peartreepoultry.co.uk

Tudor Chickens
LF: Light Sussex, wheaten Marans, cuckoo Marans, RIR, Welsummer, Cream Legbar, buff Orpington. Bantam: miniature white Silkies, gold Silkies. POL & H/E. Nationwide delivery service
www.tudorwholesale.co.uk

NOTTS/DERBYS/ LEIC/MIDLANDS

Clucking Good Chickens
07876342256/ 07974078691 (pm & w/e please). Buxton,

Derbys. French copper and wheaten Marans (v dark egg strain). Top show quality Brahma LF: Dark, gold, light & rare gold-laced. H/E, chicks & growers
www.cluckinggoodchickens.co.uk

Hens for Pets
01623 793841/07860 436586, Notts, NG15 9HN. Hybrids POL range of colours. Cream Crested Legbar. Bantams: Sabelpoot, Pekin, Silkie, Dutch, Poland, NHR, Sussex. Bantam H/E
www.hensforpets

Hippichicks
01709 814443, S Yorks/ Notts border, nr Worksop. Pekin: lavender, buff, black, mottled, millefleur. H/E, D/O to POL. White Silkie bantam H/E. LF Welsummer & silver laced Orpington available soon
www.hippichicks.co.uk

Andrew Lee
01909 540201 / 0758 0246926, Worksop, Notts. Faverolles: blue, black, salmon. Brahma: Columbian, gold laced, dark, red, lemon pyle. Cochin: black, blue, white, cuckoo, buff, frizzle. Pekin: millefleur, salmon, silver wheaten, cuckoo, mottled, plain colours & frizzle. Poland, most colours inc frizzle. Geese, Runners in apricot, fawn, white
www.henleechickens.co.uk

Michael Pick
07921 762007/0116 2673528, Leicester. Specialist breeder of blue egg laying hybrid pullets. Lay 100% blue/green eggs. Docile & attractive. Looking for agents. Sexed D/O only

Helen Stretton
07765612814 / 01159724800, Notts/Derby. Quality large fowl & bantam exhibition birds. Young stock up to POL: salmon Faverolles, Brahmas, Cochins, Orpingtons. Many colours available from homebred birds supplied with care package and follow-on help & advice

WALES

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07713 168189/01873 855580. Pure bred & hybrid chickens. Ducks inc high quality & rare Indian Runners. Geese. D/O to POL, H/E sometimes available
www.ajrpoultry.co.uk

Camddwr Poultry
01974 251 425/07875 963966, Ceredigion.Breeders and suppliers of turkeys, geese, chickens, ducks & Guinea fowl
www.camddwrpoultry.co.uk

Cosy Hens
01291 650655, Monmouthshire. Faverolles: Salmon. Sussex: Light, buff. Orpington: black, splash, gold laced. Marans: French Copper Blue, black, splash, wheaten. Vorwerk. Welsummer. RIRs. H/E, chicks, growers, POL. Modern hybrids. Please visit our website for full details
www.cosyhens.co.uk

DC Pure Breeds
01570 481155, Carms. Orpingtons: black, blue, buff, gold laced. Marans: French black copper, cuckoo. Dorkings, silver grey. LF only, H/E. Mrs Deanne Cook

D E Francis
01437 751243. Specialist breeder of original, true to type Cream Legbars. Also utility brown Leghorns

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01691 718261/0786 6359653 Llangollen/N Wales. Ancona, Buff Sussex, Cream Legbar, Friesian Fowl, lavender Araucana, RIR, Welsummer, gold Dutch bantam, Guinea Fowl & bronze turkeys. Brown hybrids also available. H/E a speciality (collected or posted). Cocks of all breeds usually available. Friendly advice given
E: jeni@chickenandegg.net

H Reynolds
01239 820690, Newport. Very rare Sonnerat's Jungle Fowl. 2012-hatched pairs or singles. Book early for 2013 birds

Thorntree Wyandottes
01978 755631, Wrexham. LF & bantam Wyandottes: gold & silver laced, silver pencilled, partridge. H/E when available

IRELAND

Olly's Bantams
028 92 638599, Lisburn. Suffolk Chequers, bantam silver Sussex, white Hamburgh type H/E, D/O, pullets. Also bantam roosters bought

CAMBS/LINCS

Beachfen Wyandottes, Leghorns
01223 860139/07710 866515, Cambs. LF: Wyandottes: silver, gold, buff, blue laced, partridge, blue partridge, buff Columbian. Leghorn: brown, black, blue, white, buff, Exchequer, red mottled. Light Sussex, RIR, Barnevelder, blue Barnevelder. Marans, Andalusian. H/E available

Sally Prescott
01472 840142, E Lincs. Buff Plymouth Rock & Australorp (black & blue) bantams

A Searle
01223 860023, Chittering, Cambs. Large fowl: Wyandottes; silver laced, white. Orpingtons; black,

BREEDER DIRECTORY

blue. Bantam partridge Wyandottes

Darren Williamson
075401 83970, Spalding. White Faced Tree ducks, Goldeneye, Tufted Chiloe Wigeon, European Wigeon, RCP. European Pochard. Various Teals & ornamental geese, red-breasted and Ross. Also Goldtop bantams

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E: philip@lee-woolf.co.uk
www.legbarsofbroadway.co.uk

Chartley Chucks
07736 960835, Jeff & Jane. Staffs. RIR, speckled Sussex, Marans, Cream Legbar, Plymouth Rock bantams, Leghorns, Friesians, Sabelpoots. D/O chicks & growers. POL hybrids
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Colehurst Cottage Gardens
07527 628192/01630 638177, N Shrops. Rare & pure breeds. Lincolnshire Buff, Cream Legbar, Derbyshire Redcap, Dorking, Ixworth, Marsh Daisy, Norfolk Grey, Scots Grey. Norfolk Black turkeys. H/E, chicks, pullets & birds
www.colehurstcottagegardens.co.uk

Hansnett Hens and Houses
01531 670439, Ledbury. Bantam: Wyandottes; blue laced, lavender & barred. Pekins, 12 colours. LF: French Wheaten, Copper Blue Marans, H/E to order & houses
www.hansnettfarm.co.uk

Hillview Ducks
01386 860137/07999 507442. Khaki Campbell, Cherry Valley ducks from sexed D/O to POL. Both excellent layers. Small or large orders taken
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JC Poultry
01630 658971, Market Drayton. OEG bantams all colours. Californian quail, Mexican speckled quail. Mandarin ducks.
H/E available

Clare Lovegrove
07973 331142. Glos/Worcs border. Indian Runner, Call, Miniature Silver Appleyard, Khaki Campbell, Abacot Ranger. Magpie, Aylesbury, Rouen. Cuckoo Marans & POL hybrids
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Martin & Jill Lasance
07803 203924 Staffs/ Shropshire border. Rare breed poultry. Campines, Friesians, Lakenvelders, Vorwerk. Croad Langshan. Bantam: Hamburghs, Plymouth Rock, Japanese including frizzles and silkies. Show stock/all ages/H/E when available.
Help/advice given

May Cottage Collection
01691 682383, Shrops/Welsh border. Pekin bantams: buff/cuckoo, lemon/cuckoo, lavender, black mottled & cuckoo. Seramas, Barbu d'Uccle & d'Anvers. White miniature bearded Silkies. H/E - POL. Muscovy ducks, Black East Indies bantam ducks. Various quail & aviary birds also available

Pembridge Poultry
01544 388270, Leominster, Herefordshire. Cuckoo Marans, wheaten Marans, Copper Blue Marans, Cream Legbar, Exchequer Leghorn, silver-laced Wyandotte, Norfolk Grey, lemon-pencilled Friesian Fowl & silver Campines. H/E, chicks & POL pullets usually available
www.pembridgepoultry.co.uk

Pheasant Croft Poultry
01885 410594, Herefordshire. LF: Vorwerk, Cream Legbars, Green Legged Partridge Fowl. Bantam: Light Sussex, Buff Rocks, Marans, silver laced Wyandotte, buff laced Wyandotte. H/E & POL
www.pheasantcroftpoultry.com F: Facebook/pheasantcroftpoultry
E: baz@pheasantcroftpoultry.com

Teme Valley Cottage Chickens
01584 781371, Worcs. Quality not quantity. LF: Orpingtons; gold laced, silver laced, spangled, lavender, blue, black, buff, chocolate, cuckoo. Pekins: smooth/frizzle. Black, black mottled, blue mottled, chocolate, chocolate mottled, lavender, buff, lemon cuckoo. Orders taken for 2015

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Acorn Nursery
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07773 938248/07530 543456, Banbury. All colours Pekins, bantam Hamburghs, Campines, Silkies, Sebright, Rosecombs, Booted Bantams, Appenzellers. LF: buff Orpington, Light Sussex, Ixworth. Lavender & pearl Guinea fowl, jumbo Japanese quail. H/E, growers & POL
E: johnspoultry@aol.co.uk

Michael Page
01295 721076 (after 6pm/ weekends), Banbury. LF: Cuckoo & copper black Marans, Welsummer, Light & buff Sussex, lavender Araucana. Bantam: Pekins - lemon cuckoo, millefleur, lavender, gold partridge. H/E, chicks, growers

Rainsbrook Minorcas
01788 573844 / 07803 900326. Minorcas, hens and cockerels

Rheas of Warwick
01926 842635. Grey & white rheas. Golden, Reeves & Swinhoe Pheasants, Buff Pekins sometimes available
www.rheasofwarwick.co.uk

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All Pure Poultry
01379 588136, Harleston. LF: buff, blue Orps; gold, blue Brahmas; Welsummer, Ixworth, Marans Bantam: silver, blue laced Wyandottes; lavender, black Pekins, Barbu d'Uccle,Light Sussex

Anglia Wildfowl
07752 160009 Indian Runners 10 colours, Crested 9 colours, various Calls, Appleyard, Aylesbury & many others, also wildfowl, ducks, geese, swans, large fowl, bantams, pigeons, Guinea fowl, pheasants
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www.bellebantams.co.uk

Bill Bolton
01245 472752/ 07979 528137, Essex. Bantam; Pekin, many cols; Wyandotte; silver, gold, silver/gold partridge; Poland; frizzle Poland. W/fowl: black swan; Mandarin; Carolina; Ring Teal; Chiloe Widgeon; Calls. All birds home-bred

Bulmer Poultry
017887 269306, Sudbury. Show quality Jersey Giants LF in blue, black & splash. LF Brahma, lemon pyle, blue, black, white. Bantam: lavender Pekin, buff laced Wyandotte, silver spangled Appenzeller Spitzhauben. Guinea fowl, water fowl

Mr & Mrs Chilvers
01379 852464, Harleston. Bantam: Japanese inc Silkies, Faverolles, Poland, Yokohama. LF: Cream Legbar, Orpington, Norfolk Greys

Custom Cluckers Chickens
07890 282484, Little Clacton. Fully-vaccinated POL hens: commercial browns, Rhode Rock, Speckledey, Light Sussex, Bluebells. Bantams also available

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Essex Orpingtons
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Please note that entries are for **livestock only** and are limited to 40 words. Entries may be edited.

Bruce Howell
01362 668303, Dereham. Swans, geese & ornamental waterfowl inc Pintails, Teals, Wigeon, Sea & Tree ducks. Guinea fowl, pheasants. Poultry inc Welsummer, French copper blacks. Also rare breeds www.brucehowellwaterfowl.co.uk

Helen's Happy Hens
07774 486624/07833 980158, Colchester. LF: white Leghorn, Lakenvelder, Marans, RIR, silver spangled Hamburgh. Bantam: buff Sussex, RIR. H/E for all these breeds

Honeybourne Smallholding
01953 451963, Norfolk. POL hybrids, all vaccinated. 7 breeds inc Rhode Rock, Sussex Ranger, Pied Ranger, Speckledy, Beechwood Blue, Amber Link, Calder Ranger. Friendly advice
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K & D Lomas
01708 370120, Upminster, Essex. Bantam:black Naked Neck, lavender Araucana. LF: Welsummer, Vorwerk, salmon Faverolles, Cream Legbar, Ixworth

Jim Kemp
01359 269515, Suffolk. Pekin, Silkie, Barbu d'Uccle, Sebright, Wyandotte, bantam Barnevelder. H/E

Maisebrooke Farm & Shop's Chicken Courtyard
01502 711018 / 07436264612 / 07833 961159, Bungay/ Beccles Rd. Always available, up to 60 breeds & colours of ornamental & utility poultry. H/E, D/O, growers, POL. Vaccinated. Thurs-Sun inc, 10-5pm. Email for list & prices maisebrookechicken courtyard@hotmail.com

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01328 700957. LF: Brahma: lemon pyle, red pyle, gold & blue partridge, black, blue, darks, blue splash. Salmon Faverolles Bantam: Pekin; grey, mottled, porcelain, black, lemon. Barbu d'Uccle (millefleur) in buff.
www.norfolkbrahmas.com

Orchard View Bantams
07766 969294, Dunmow. Pekins in various colours available. Occasionally fertile eggs
E: orchardviewbantams@hotmail.co.uk

Sam's Bantams
01206 262214/01787 468677, Colchester. Bantam: Wyandotte, Dutch, gold and silver Sebright

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01708 688257/07725 754719, Essex. LF: Brahma, Orpington, Welsummer, silverduckwing Welsummer. Bantam: Marans, Welsummer, Pekin. Ducks: German Pekin, Cayuga, Saxony. Birds & H/E, other breeds sometimes available

BEDS/BUCKS/HERTS

Catrin's Garden Poultry
07890 403675, Bucks. Cream Legbar, Croad Langshan, Friesan, Fayoumi, Lakenvelder, Marans cuckoo/French, Pendesenca, RIR, RIR X LS, Spanish, Light Sussex, TNN, Welsummer. Bantam: Ancona, Araucana, Belgian, Leghorn, Marans, Pekin, Silkie, Light & speckled Sussex, Vorwerk. Eggs to adult E: clacy@gotadsl.co.uk

Cock and Pullet
07944 272318, Sharnbrook, Beds. Variety of POL hybrids, inc: Lohmann, Light Sussex & Bluebelles. Breeders of various pure breeds inc: Pekin, Araucana & Cream Legbars. Ducklings & goslings available seasonally
www.cockandpullet.net

Cole Green Chickens
07768 444161, Herts. Bantam: Orpington; chocolate, gold laced, silver laced, chocolate cuckoo, cuckoo. Wyandotte; chocolate, lavender, buff laced, chocolate partridge, chocolate cream partridge. Pekin; lavender, red pile, millefleur, salmon, lemon cuckoo, white wheaten. LF: RIR & crested Cream Legbars. H/E, chicks & POL
E: mickmaguire@fsmail.net

Corner Wood Farm
07890 551646, Welwyn. Hybrids: Goldlines (fully vaccinated), Geeno Blues. Bantam: Orpingtons, Pekins, Wyandottes. LF: Orpingtons, Silkies, Polands, RIR, Araucana, Sussex. Sebastapol geese. Ducks: Cayuga, Mini Silver Appleyards
www.cornerwoodpoultry.co.uk

Pelham Poultry
07768 990716 (Lindsay). Wyandotte, Marans, Orpington, Legbar, Sussex, Cochin & hybrids plus many more. Call for details

Thorne's Poultry Centre
01462 675767, Herts. Hybrids/ P/breeds, shop open 7 days

WILTS/HANTS/BERKS

Tim Adams
01722 782445, Salisbury. Bantam: Barbu d'Uccle (blue, black, Porcelaine), buff Japanese. Porcelain & pearl grey Ruhlaer Zwergkauler bantams
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Anax Poultry
01256 850718 Specialist breeders of LF: Hamburghs in gold, silver, lemon pencilled, gold, silver spangled, black. Croad Langshans in black, white. Mandarins, Carolinas, Bahama Pintails, Pinkfeet and many other ornamental waterfowl usually available in season
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Hamble Valley Poultry
077385 70740, Hants. Pure bred quality Silkies & Polands from registered breeder. Bantam & LF. Vaccinated birds from non-related stock. H/E by post. Hatching- service provided. Poultry care & starter pack for all customers, advice freely given.
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www.hamblevalleypoultry.co.uk

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DORSET/GLOS/SOMERSET/AVON

Blackdown Poultry
07980 021441, Buckland St Mary. All our hens are vaccinated, wormed & hatched from our own stock. Breeds include bantam & LF. Pekin, Frizzle, Poland, Sussex, Marans, Silkie, Cream Crested Legbar, Barnevelder, Brahma
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Langlea Poultry
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E: manchela89@yahoo.co.uk

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FB page: Moorlands Backyard Chooks

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www.guineafowl.co.uk

Al's Eggs N'More
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Black Rock Chicken
01326 340361, Cornwall. Black Rock pullets. Good, brown egg-laying chickens. Ideal for free ranging

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Edgemoor Poultry
01769 520244/ 07938 114438, north Devon. Rare breeds. Cochin, salmon Faverolles, Orloff, dark Brahma, saddleback Yokohama, Malay, laced Wyandotte, chamois Poland, Sabelpoot, blue Pekin, gold bearded Silkie. Giant Toulouse, Sebastapol geese

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07719 742848, Camborne area. Ornamental pheasants; Golden, Lady Amherst, silver & Edwards
www.feathersfantastic.co.uk

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01326 340361/07410 611805, Cornwall. POL chickens 18 weeks. Various breeds, all good egg layers. Fully-vaccinated. Available from end Feb. Small or large orders.

Garden Cottage Poultry
07764 939299. LF: Wyandotte, Orpington, Brahma, LCN, wheaten Marans, speckled Sussex, blue Plymouth Rock, Cochin. Bantam: Orpington, Wyandotte, Silkie, Vorwerk, Brahma. Ducks: Runner, Calls, crested Calls, Bantam. Crested geese, various pheasants

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01243 264796, Chichester. Pekin bantams, various colours inc. Millefleur. Light & Buff Sussex bantams. LF Sussex & Marans occasionally for sale. H/E in season

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01795 531124, Faversham. Specialist own reared, wide variety of POL hybrid hens, available all year round. Hen houses and accessories, regular workshops
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www.henhousepoultry.co.uk

Kent Poultry
07824741109. H/E, large fowl laced & pencilled Wyandottes, buff Orpingtons, bantam Silkies, quail
www.kentpoultry.co.uk

Martins Wood
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www.martinswood chickens.co.uk

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01892 723115, Tonbridge, Kent. LF: Brahmas, Orpingtons, most colours. Red Saddled Yokohamas, Sumatras, Orloffs, Marans, Welsummers, Barnevelders, Appenzellers. Bantam: Orpingtons, Belgian, Pekins, Burmese & others. Franconian geese, Buff-backed geese. Call ducks & some wildfowl. Peafowl. Pigeons

The Old Gardens
0777 5670 819, Sidlesham, West Sussex. Rare breeds, poultry, bantams, including Silkies. Chicks. Turkeys, geese, ducks, quail. Pigeons. White Peace Dove hire for weddings or funerals. Closed on Tuesdays

Park Farm Poultry
0780 3046109/ 01372 7267772, Chessington. Bantam: silver grey Dorking, silver laced & barred Wyandotte, Welsummer, partridge Pekin, gold laced Orpington, Belgian Barbu d'Uccle millefleur, white Silkie. H/E to POL

Southmead Poultry
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SPR Centre
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www.surbitonpoultry andhenhouses.co.uk

Swedish Flower Chickens
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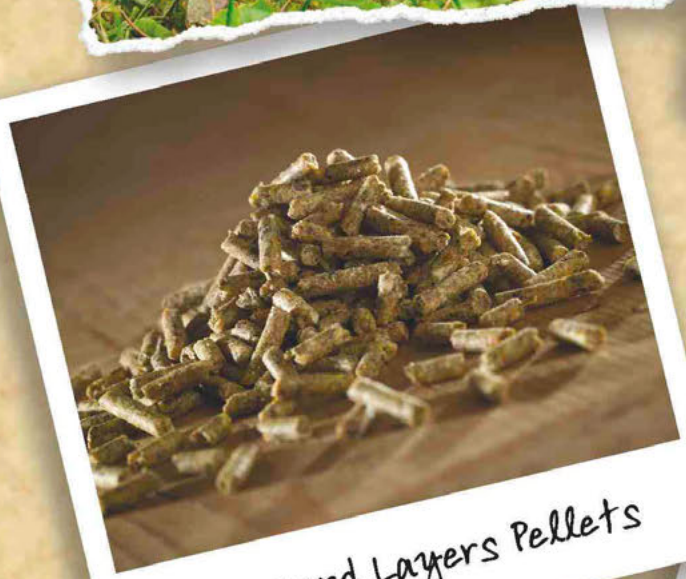
MARRIAGE'S

Chick Crumb + Coccidiostat



Farmyard Layers Pellets

Farmyard Layers Mash

MARRIAGE'S FEEDS PROVIDE COMPLETE NUTRITION FOR FREE RANGE POULTRY AT EVERY LIFE STAGE.

THEY CONTAIN QUALITY PROTEINS, VITAMINS AND MINERALS THAT WILL ENSURE HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE HENS.

Please contact us for further information:
01245 612019 www.marriagefeeds.co.uk

Verm-X®

Natural Control of Intestinal Hygiene

VETERINARY APPROVED AVIAN

HEALTHY CHICKENS, HAPPY YOU.

Terry Beebe
Respected poultry breeder and author.

"I have worked with Verm-X for over 5 years and I recommend it to all poultry keepers.

SAFEGUARD WITH VERM-X

'You can eat the eggs whilst feeding Verm-X'

Please call us for a free brochure or visit www.verm-x.com

ETHICAL AWARD

ORGANIC FARMERS GROWERS
Verm-X is the Only Herbal Approved Preparation available

THE GREEN ORGANISATION
2011 Award Winner in Farming and Agriculture

HOLISTIC

Are you concerned about using pharmaceuticals?

Feeding **Verm-X** to your chickens or ducks and other poultry is the natural and organic way to improve intestinal hygiene by providing daily protection keeping your birds healthy and you happy.

Being 100% Natural when feeding award winning **Verm-X** you can continue to enjoy fresh eggs every day, no wastage as when using some pharmaceutical preparations.

Verm-X consists of herbs that have been used for centuries as a natural way to control intestinal hygiene along with many other benefits that will make your birds shine with health.

Recommended by vets **Verm-X®** for poultry is available in a pelleted or liquid form.

Verm-X is the only product of its type which is licensed for use in organic systems.

SAFEGUARD WITH VERM-X
Treat Your Flock

Suitable for

The herbs used in our Verm-X formulations include:

Cinnamon, Garlic, Peppermint, Common Thyme, Cleavers, Cayenne, Quassia, Fennel, Nettle (Iron), Slippery Elm and Echinacea.

NO ARTIFICIAL CHEMICALS

"Having such a powerful and effective product containing only herbs for supporting the intestines during periods of challenge and that promotes health is a revelation.

Recommended by Vets

See Vet Nick Thompson's talk on herbs YouTube

Verm-X® Natural Control of Intestinal Hygiene

100% Natural **An effective formulation for supporting intestinal health during periods of challenge**

Available from your local pet and country retailer or online

Please call us or check our website for your nearest stockist **www.verm-x.com** **+44 (0)870 850 2313** **sales@verm-x.com**

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